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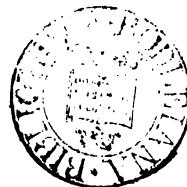
THE TOWER OF THE HAWK



Illustrated
by
H. H. RICHARDSON
House of Hawksong



THE
TOWER OF THE HAWK;
SOME PASSAGES
IN THE
HISTORY OF THE HOUSE OF HAPSBURG.
W. W. W.
BY
THE AUTHOR OF "CHILLON," ETC.



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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

THERE are few travellers, when about to plunge into the intricacies of a catacomb, or explore the ruins of a feudal castle, but would thankfully accept the services of a guide whose previous researches qualified him to furnish a clue for the one, and to throw some light on the history of the other.

It is thus, we hope, that our readers, before they enter on our tale of the past, will courteously accept our assistance in clearing away some of its mediæval haziness by a short sketch of the period immediately antecedent to its commencement.

The murder of Albert the First, Emperor of Germany (son of the great Rudolph, who founded the dynasty, which in the female branch still reigns in Austria), was perpetrated on the 1st of May, 1308—on the spring's bright holiday—in the view of numerous friends and armed retainers, from whom he was separated only by the narrow stream of the Reuss.

The rank of the victim, the romantic interest attached to each individual actor in the tragedy, the retributive justice which may almost be said to have impelled the deed; and yet more the savage cruelties which revenged it, make it one of the most striking records of history.

However much we abhor the act itself, it must be admitted that Albert deserved his fate. Left by his father sole guardian of the person and estates of his orphan grandson, Prince John of Suabia, this perfidious uncle kept his nephew in sordid penury, and seized on his honours and possessions, which he lavished on his own sons. Prince John himself was of a gentle nature, and would probably have submitted to his uncle's rapacity, had he not been urged to revenge by his tutor, the Baron von Eschenberg, and other indignant adherents; and had not unpremeditated circumstances hastened the fatal crisis.

Whilst the Emperor, whose tyranny and ambition involved him in perpetual wars and insurrections, was assembling an army to wipe out a defeat he had suffered in Thuringen, he received the intelligence of the revolt of the three Swiss Cantons, which obliged him to employ his forces in that direction. The wary potentate had foreseen this event, and had encouraged his agents in the oppression which fomented it, in order to gain a pretext for depriving the Swiss of their country, and

making them his slaves; but he calculated not the mighty resistance of a brave and oppressed people.

We need not relate here the well-known story of William Tell and the liberators of Uri, but will continue that of their oppressor. Previous to his march against the revolted Forest Cantons, Albert assembled his knights and barons at a feast in the hall of the Castle of Baden, the ruins of which still crown the steep hill that rises above that romantic town. At this banquet the injured Prince, urged on by his indignant supporters, presented to his uncle a pressing appeal for the restitution of his territories and birthright. This just demand was met by contempt and irony. "Take this," said the Emperor, throwing his nephew a garland of flowers, "as better suited to your years; leave government to mine." Fatal taunt,—revenged almost as soon as uttered.

On leaving the banquet, the Emperor proceeded through the town to the ferry of the Reuss, intending to cross that river on his way to his Castle of Hapsburg on the opposite side; there to take leave of the Empress before his departure for the war. That he should have trusted himself with only one attendant in a small boat, otherwise filled by his exasperated nephew and his five supporters, is a mystery which history does not explain, whilst she affirms the fact.

On reaching the opposite shore, and whilst crossing the plain, John again reiterated his claims, which provoking only further insult, the exasperated Prince aimed a murderous blow at the throat of his uncle; Balm ran the Emperor through with his sword, and Eschenbach consummated the savage deed in cleaving his skull by a felling stroke. Wart alone remained aloof, and he alone suffered the penalty, being afterwards taken, and racked to death on the wheel. The rest escaped, only to feel that life was but a more enduring torture. Deserted also by his base attendant, the dying Emperor was found weltering in his blood by a peasant woman who accidentally passed that way. She raised the wretched monarch and supported him for many hours, until,

“Unknown, on that meek humble breast
Imperial Albert died.”

The Emperor was interred on the spot that had drunk his life-blood—called thence Koenigsfelden (the Field of the King). The Empress Elizabeth, and their daughter Agnes, the widowed Queen of Hungary, raised over it the superb Abbey of Koenigsfelden; building it, as well as endowing its two monastic communities, with the confiscated estates of the conspirators, and of those hundreds of their innocent relatives and retainers. More than a thousand of these guiltless victims,

it is said, were offered up on the altar of cupidity and revenge ! Such was the thirst for blood of the cruel Agnes that she exclaimed, whilst witnessing the decapitation of sixty brave knights, whose only crime was their kindred blood to one or other of the conspirators, “Now I bathe in rose-dew.” But retribution tarried not. The after-lives of Agnes and her equally guilty brother Leopold were rendered insupportable by remorse. Haunted, when the thirst of revenge was quenched, by the bleeding ghosts of his murdered victims, Leopold became subject to temporary fits of insanity, in one of which he was prematurely cut off; whilst Agnes, immured in the Convent of Koenigsfelden, through years of self-inflicted penance,—for she lived to extreme old age,—vainly struggled to blot out deeds which could not be thus atoned for, or erased.

History acquits their elder brother, Frederick, of any active participation in their crimes; indeed, in painting his portrait and fate, she seems to have dipped her pencil in the tints of romance. The favourite of Nature, he was no less the sport of Fortune. At his father’s death he strove long and valiantly for the iron crown, which for a brief space encircled his noble brow. Pope John XXII. refused to ratify the election, using his influence to snatch it thence in favour of the rival candidate, Louis of Bavaria. At the battle of Muhldorf

Frederick lost both his crown and liberty to this generous opponent, who treated him rather as a brother than a captive, by soliciting the hand of his daughter for his son.*

After three years of captivity, yielding to Frederick's yearnings for freedom and a return to his friends, Louis sent him back to his hereditary dominions with but one stipulation. Failing to obtain from his brothers Albert and Leopold a solemn promise to renounce all claim on the imperial dignity, Frederick pledged his honour and faith that he would return after a certain period and resume his chains. We have chosen the moment of the captive's return to his hereditary Castle of Hapsburg for the commencement of our tale; and as the history will be developed in its pages, we need not follow it here.

A short description of its principal localities may not be unacceptable.

The hereditary possessions of the House of Hapsburg, though bounded in extent, are distinguished by local beauty and historical interest. The Castle, of which only a ruined tower remains, stood on the edge of a high promontory

* Frederick had one child, a daughter, named Elizabeth (or Bertha), who was betrothed to the King of Bohemia, but who died unmarried (it was said) of the plague."—COXE's *Memoirs of the House of Hapsburg*.

overlooking a diversified prospect of hill and plain, forest and glade, framed in by snow-clad mountains. The ancient town of Brugg forms a picturesque feature in this prospect, but with still greater pleasure does the eye rest, a little farther onward, on the beautiful ruins of the Abbey of Koenigsfelden; and finally, on the three principal rivers of Switzerland, the Reuss, the Limmat, and the Aar, which form a confluence on the plain a little below the town of Brugg. Nor is the historical interest of the locality inferior to its natural beauty. There are few spots on which the human race has left a more distinct and successive impression. The Roman town Vindonissa, and its wide extended defences, may yet be traced in the remains of its broken aqueduct; whilst on the coin which the plough yet turns up is found the superscription of the once masters of the world. The wild waves of barbarism next rolled over the soil, sweeping away all before it, and only to be traced in destruction. This subsiding, Feudalism built its castles on every eminence, of which many of the ruins remain. Ecclesiastic rule next became dominant, and the beautiful Abbey of Koenigsfelden arose—in its turn, to yield to the Reformation and freedom.

The Papal ban deprived the House of Hapsburg of its Swiss territories 150 years after the elevation of Rudolph to

the imperial throne ; and the monastery of Koenigsfelden was suppressed at the Reformation in 1528.

Yet amid these quick-passing footsteps of man,—

“ Amid the rise and fall of nations and dynasties,
Thrones, dominations, princedoms, virtues, powers,—”

the material creation around swerved not from its course ; the verdure of the plain has been renewed each spring, the forest reclothed with foliage ; the snow-topped mountains still catch the aurora of opening day, and reflect in rosy tints its closing rays ; whilst the giant glaciers fail not to supply from their icy caves the sister streams that, uniting at this storied spot, flow on together to join the abounding Rhine, and finally to lose themselves, together with it, in the ocean.

THE TOWER OF THE HAWK.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONVENT GARDEN.

A populous solitude of bees and birds,
And fairy-formed and many-coloured things.—*BYRON.*

OUR tale of the past opens on a scene of such local beauty as still arrests the steps of the tourist, and at an hour and season when that beauty is most attractive—the sunset hour of early autumn. The summer-parched earth, fanned by fresh breezes and moistened by abounding dews, yielded its golden harvest: glowing fruits displaced the leaves under whose shelter they had swelled and ripened, and the rays of the setting sun gilded the bowery gardens of the Abbey of Koenigsfelden and played around its lofty pinnacles.

This superb monument to the memory of Albert the First, Emperor of Germany (commemorative alike of the most enduring love and direst revenge), was raised by his widow, the Empress Elizabeth, and her daughter, the Dowager Queen of Hungary, on the spot on which the Emperor was murdered by his exasperated nephew, John of Swabia, and his fellow-conspirators: thence its name of Koenigsfelden, or the Field of the King.

The chapel still remains to claim, for its architectural proportions and stained windows, the notice of the summer tourist, enhanced in interest by the tradition that the mangled

remains of the Emperor were laid beneath its high altar, on the exact spot where he breathed his last sigh on the bosom of a poor peasant, the sole soother of his dying pangs. Of the rich monasteries, reared and endowed from the sequestered lands of the few guilty, and the thousand innocent victims, little remains to point out their former opulence. They consisted originally of two spacious buildings, one on each side the chapel. At the period of which we write, the commencement of the fourteenth century, one of them was occupied by a brotherhood of the rule of St. Francis, the monastic order then in the ascendency; the other by a female community of the same rigid rule, commonly called the Poor Nuns of St. Klare. The front of this long range of buildings was traversed by a broad terrace, leading by several marble steps into that portion of the extensive gardens which might be more exclusively termed pleasure-ground, since it was elaborately laid out in stiff parterres, edged with shell-work and filled with many fair and fragrant flowers. It was, moreover, ornamented with a fountain that poured its abundant waters from the mouth of a gilded and erect serpent which, with two equally rude effigies of our first parents in their primeval innocence, rose from the centre of the marble basin that received the overflowing stream. That mountain torrent, thus arrested, went murmuring onward through artificial banks of rock-work and fringing ferns, until it reached the edge of a steep declivity, hollowed out to form a defence for this side of the convent garden. Over this, as if indignant at its forced delay, it fell foaming and tumbling as it hastened onward through the plain below, to join the three rivers of the Reuss, the Limmat, and the Aar, which there mingle their waters: cold mountain-streams fresh from their icy caves, whose waves, once tinged with royal blood, were afterwards more deeply dyed from the veins of innocent victims shed to revenge it. In addition to the wall of lofty buildings and guardian precipice, the fair enclosure was surrounded on the two other sides by forests of fir-trees and low brushwood, whose impervious shade was occasionally arched into vistas, at the end of which,

as a guard against prying eye and wandering foot, were displayed some fresco representations of the fires of purgatory, some martyred Jerome, or arrow-pierced Sebastian. The garden was divided into regular compartments, some planted with fruit-trees, or stored with vegetables for the "guiltless feasts" of the anchorites, and others, again, filled with herbs for medicinal purposes; but, whether in the luxuriance of the produce, the graceful training of the loaded boughs, or in the symmetrical order of the whole, the hand of skill and taste was everywhere visible. Nor was the finish of design wanting, although marked by the quaint characteristics of the period, and nowhere more evidenced than in the artful turnings and windings of the mazy alleys, all terminating round a grassy mound surmounted by a little grated chapel, dedicated to "Our Lady of the Mount," the sole end and aim of the poor recluses' wanderings in their convent garden.

The scene was tranquil, but not solitary, for the bee was yet buried in the flower-bell, the nightingale had preluded her evening song, the thrush was still warbling his parting note, and the monotonous plashing of the water formed no unapt accompaniment to the wild concert of nature.

Two human beings also tenanted this sylvan retirement—a grotesque pair, grouping well with the scene around. The elder and more imposing personage, mounted on a ladder, was occupied in gathering some pears of tempting ripeness, which he placed carefully in a basket held by his companion. His habit proclaimed him an inhabitant of the monastery, although its rigid uniformity had been in a degree relaxed to facilitate his gardening labours. A coarse apron, into the girdle of which he had stuck his pruning-knife, was fastened round his ample waist, and its capacious pockets filled with matting, shreds, and other gardening appliances. A small cap of grey cloth partially covered his head, but did not conceal the yet redundant though silvered locks which fringed his shaven crown. His stature was low, but his figure displayed that sinewy robustness which is induced by light labour in the open air, and, doubtless from the same cause, his countenance was cheerful,

and his complexion as rosy as his own bright-cheeked pears. His companion might be described by contrast: shadow and substance, mirth and melancholy, are not more opposed than were the garrulous old gardener and his mute mate. The lad was about seventeen; he might have been judged a year or two older or younger according to his prevailing humour. His form at first sight conveyed an idea of deformity, arising rather from awkwardness of gait and manner, and the imbecility indicated by his movements, than from any deficiency of nature. He was tall and slender, and his features, as far as they could be traced through the mass of hair which fell in matted curls over them, were delicate and regular; but his eyes, flashing through the shadowy screen, were so painfully restless that, like jealous guards, they warded off all impudent investigation. When free from observation, it was said this nervous motion subsided into a calm which partook of the nature of thought and, although always taciturn and melancholy, he was at such times docile and reasonable. The latter assertion, however, poor Henga's most partial advocates were compelled to believe on the somewhat dubious testimony of the old gardener, whose lust of talking was gratified in finding in his mute companion a fairer pretext for declamation, and quite as safe a confidant as his flowers and cabbages. That there were amongst his humble friends, his grandame in particular, those who claimed for Henga the still higher distinction of oracular endowment should not excite astonishment, when it is recollected that he belonged to a country which still holds as sacred the human plant on which the mildew of *cretinism* has fallen. The influence also which this apparently unconscious being possessed over the cold shrunken heart of his patroness, the Lady Abbess, deepened the superstitious tenderness with which he was regarded. A whisper had escaped from the deep recesses of the cloister that he had even occasionally uttered in her presence stern truths and mysterious warnings; and these were interpreted as the miraculous breathings of the Holy Spirit. It was well known that the mother of Henga, who died in giving him birth, had claims on the House of Hapsburg which were

naturally transferred to her infant; but the love of the marvellous, so natural to the human heart, was a part of the faith of our ancestors of the Middle Ages; and the halo thrown round that unfortunate class of beings of whom we write seems mercifully to have preserved them from the neglect and contempt to which their natural infirmities might otherwise have subjected them. Whatever lustre, however, might have been shed over poor Henga's mental aberrations, his personal defects were rather exaggerated than concealed by his dress, which was as gay and fantastic as his demeanour was sad and methodical. His doublet of dark cloth was crossed diagonally with stripes of yellow lace, the livery of the House of Austria. The sleeves were slashed with the same colour, and the covering of his head, but for the lack of the merry bells, was exactly such as was worn by the court jester of the period. Alack, the poor lad, however much a sharer in the infirmities of the light-hearted brotherhood, was no partaker of their mirth.

Before we allow Henga's companion, the good father Swithin, to speak for himself (a privilege he is likely often to claim during the progress of our narrative) we beg the reader's indulgence for a few particulars respecting his antecedents, which were of no commonplace quality. Our good friar was the seventh son of a poor charcoal-burner in the neighbouring forests, and might have remained buried and unignited beneath the dust of his father's pile, had he not possessed a medium of attrition in his aunt, the housekeeper of the parish priest. This portly and somewhat capricious dame, after having raised aspiring hopes in each of his six elder brothers, crushed them by the final selection of Fritz for the service of her master. Here, after climbing every step on the ladder of preferment, from the first round as goatherd and errand boy, he was found to possess a genius of such wonderful versatility that he was not only promoted to the station of highest domestic importance under his aunt, but permitted to enjoy a monopoly of all the offices he had filled in his progress. Fritz's capacity, nevertheless, was fully equal to this plurality of benefices: he was a human spinning

jenny in rapid execution—a prodigy of usefulness, and a miracle of good humour. His patron, it must be allowed, did all he could to foster his talents and reward his services; for, not only did he liberally feed and clothe the lad, but, observing his appetite for instruction, taught him to the best of his ability. Thus, when Fritz had dressed the dinner to the satisfaction of his employer, driven home the goats, chaffered for the fattest pig, and conveyed his aunt's fardingale without crumpling from the tailor's, he was allowed half an hour for the cultivation of his own mind in reading to his patron from three manuscripts, the sole literary possessions of the learned priest. Nor do we say this disparagingly; for when such were sometimes sold for their weight in gold, the property added much to the dignity of the owner. The subjects of these precious parchments were agreeably varied. The most voluminous and best preserved manuscript contained a marvellous account of the lives and exploits of the Saints and Martyrs of the Romish Church; another, though somewhat dilapidated, the scarcely less romantic history of the heathen deities of Greece and Rome. But by far the most interesting in Fritz's eyes was the third, containing a curious, and in many respects valuable, treatise on horticulture, including a copious herbal and hints on the medicinal properties of plants. The moments spent in deciphering these mystic scrolls were certainly the happiest of the poor lad's life; but, as his teacher made a point of the scholar's reading a portion of each subject daily, the jumble in his young mind was prodigious between the equally seductive myths of ancient and modern Rome. This we mention to account for an occasional blunder in the names and exploits of the heroes and heroines of each that, without this apology, might lead our readers to disparage the erudition of our favourite. Nevertheless, however the student might err in individual application, his imagination was indelibly impressed with the fairy-land of literature thus opened to him by snatches, and these three worm-eaten parchments were the Sibylline leaves of his destiny. But who that has books at his command in unheeded pro-

fusion, can imagine the luxury of that scanty intellectual feast ? or who that works by the tame routine of a modern Gardener's Calendar can form any idea of the bold flights and aspirations of the old manual, or the combinations and concoctions of its accompanying herbal ? It is true Fritz did not at once attain to the propagation of vegetable geese, nor altogether succeed in raising a crop of shrieking mandrakes ; but he never gave up the attempt or hope, and meanwhile made himself so far master of the practical art of horticulture as to excite the admiration of the whole neighbourhood, and even cause him to be consulted by the Monks of Koenigsfelden. In process of time, although not until he had attained extreme old age, Fritz's kind patron died, bequeathing to his faithful attendant, himself advanced in years, the whole of his valuable library, with a strong recommendation to the superior of the Minorites, who, fully aware of the value of the legatee and his inheritance, gladly received both within his walls. He did more : he placed the manuscripts on a shelf in his own library, and allowed the novice to discharge the practical part of the office of gardener, nominally filled by a superannuated friar. Nay, in still further evidence of his condescension, he permitted Fritz to choose his own monastic cognomen. Now, whether from the well-known influence of the saint on the weather, so essential to horticultural operations, our gardener was induced to fix on Swithin as his patron, or that the learned Bishop himself adopted the name from the celebrity of our good father of Koenigsfelden (a more probable conjecture from the respective careers of the two notables), we leave the question to be solved by more learned hagiologists, and pursue the rising fortunes of Fritz. His fame having reached even to the ear of the royal foundress, he was forthwith preferred from raising colewort for the monks to the more honourable avocation of grafting pears for the royal desserts, and cultivating flowers for the festivals of the Church. In the latter employment he had of late been assisted by the poor demented lad already introduced, whose health had declined from the confinement and forced studies to which he had been subjected in a vain

attempt to qualify him for the cowl, a vocation for which his devout frame of mind seemed to designate him. The Abbess having in her own august person consigned the boy to the care of Father Swithin, often questioned him respecting the progress and welfare of his charge, with an interest she was rarely known to bestow on any other subject; and Henga's bodily health did so improve in his pleasant change of situation that the benevolent monk indulged a hope, grounded on the alacrity and skill with which his scholar executed the light tasks he set him, that his mental powers were likewise expanding. This hope he failed not to impart to his patroness, who often sought occasions to summon the cheerful old man to her presence. But our good Swithin shall now speak for himself.

"There, Henga, thy basket is well plenished; set it on the ground, and carefully discard therefrom whatever these marauding wasps have defiled. These same blemished ones thou mayest bear to thy grandame, but we must place naught tainted or speckled on the table of princes. Knowest thou not that these pears, being most especially esteemed by our royal Abbess, are destined as a gift of welcome to her august brother, whom may the blessed Nine conduct safe to his castle? She, poor lady! deems it too great a fleshly placency to partake of them herself. A goodly example of self-denial this, but ill followed by these greedy yellow-jacketed flies. Reach hither my switch, boy, I see one of them yonder whose refection I will make free to peril." Unfortunately, before executing this act of summary justice on the pirating wasp, the gardener had neglected to secure his own footing—the step of the ladder gave way, and the executioner, the bandit, and the booty reached the ground together.

"Stop the thief, Henga!" exclaimed the prostrate monk, somewhat disconcerted by his sudden descent, yet fearful lest the wasp, who he perceived was backing out of his delicious banqueting hall, should escape; "kill him, I say!"

"Not I," muttered the lad, as he placed the insect on his fore-finger, where it remained deliberately extricating its

wings from the luscious juice ; " I thwart none who wear the Hapsburg livery."

" Thou opinest then, son," asked the gardener, with the encouraging smile with which we court the remarks of a shy child, " that these same stripes of yellow and black charter all who wear them to sip where they like ? "

" Aye, and sting where they hate," said the boy, as he flung from his hand the insect that had so ungratefully requited the mercy shown it.

" Thou hast that lesson at thy finger's end," said Father Swithin, chuckling at his own joke.

" So was it sung to me in my cradle,"* replied Henga, mournfully, in the proverb of his country.

Just at this moment the convent bell announced the hour of prayer. Henga fell on his knees, and his companion, totally unheeding his presence, continued his musings.

" Poor child ! like the Delphic oracle, he unknowingly utters melancholy truths. Well, he may be wanting in the wisdom of this world, but he has that which far outvalues it ; though it cannot be gainsaid that a little of each is needful while we sojourn here below."

In exemplification of this accommodating *dualism*, the good old man placed himself on his knees, and whilst maundering over his allotted portion of *aves*, completed Henga's neglected task, by dropping a pear into the basket at the end of each, doing this with the same regularity, and almost as much utility, as if it had been a bead of his rosary. The double task completed, he arose and remained awhile listening to the voices of the nuns, which, softened by distance, fell soothingly on the ear.

" Some of those caged linnets have almost as sweet voices as your silver-wing and gold-cap, boy, and, if it were not for the croak of an old crow or two, would make pretty harmony. I marvel St. Klare does not accord the indulgence of perpetual silence to such as have cracked their voices in her service. Hark ! that high-swellung pipe is the Sister Ethelinda's.

* So war's mir im wengen gesungen.

Sweet bird! There is little left of her but voice; which always brings to mind poor St. Echo, that edifying recluse who, dwelling in a cave, by virtue of prayers, fasts, and vigils, gradually faded away until naught remained of her but a voice. But we must away, boy, for here cometh our Princess to prosecute her evening walk, together with her preceptress and thy favourite, the novice Gertruda, her niece, —a goodly trio, like the fair Graces of ancient days who dwelt on Mount—; but never mind now where that was; thou shalt have their history, together with that of their wondrous spring, another time, if thou wilt mind me thereof. But go thou now and lay thy chaplet on the altar of our blessed 'Lady of the Mount' for our mutual behoof, and I will collect my tools by thy return."

Henga, who had remained watching the nuns as they passed the grated corridor, and apparently heedless of Father Swithin's homilies, accompanying their chaunt by a melodious second, now snatched up the tributary garland, and disappearing within the depths of a shaded alley, quickly emerged again in time to leave the garden with his companion at a side door, as three female forms were seen slowly to cross the terrace.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO VOCATIONS.

'Tis Heaven's decree, though not less loved, that some
Should tread with bleeding foot o'er thorny wilds,
Whilst others over violet-scented turf
Spring joyous.

The good father's illustration was not unapt, for, provided we substitute the Christian for the heathen Graces, we almost think the nun of St. Klare and her beautiful supporters might have furnished an artist with a new portraiture of the heavenly sisters—a pleasing variation from the three chubby children, the cross and anchor with which they are so monotonously coupled.

The middle figure of the group, the Prioress of the convent, moved with difficulty, and leaned on the arms of her companions. Her form was drooping and attenuated, her voice weak and plaintive; but there was a sweet cheerfulness in her smile which spoke of hope and patient endurance. The youthful supporters of the invalid were nearly of an age, and of a somewhat similar loveliness; but their diverse costume imparted its characteristic expression to each fair wearer. The dress of dark cloth in which one of them, a novice of St. Klare, was habited, the white veil of the noviciate thrown back over her shoulders, and the linen band drawn across a brow almost as white, proclaimed her vocation to be that of seclusion and austerity; whilst her downcast eye and slender form were in strict keeping with her monastic garb. On the other hand, the brilliant toilette of her companion, the Princess Bertha of Hapsburg, was equally suited to her more exalted rank and brighter destiny, and harmonized with the auburn glow and clearness of

complexion which generally accompanies such golden locks as fell in glossy curls over her forehead and neck. These bright tresses were partially hidden by a veil of spangled gauze fastened at the back of her head by a golden arrow, and falling nearly to her feet over a dark blue robe. Her neck and arms were encircled by Venetian chains of fine workmanship. Her shaded eyes seemed to reflect the image of all the beauteous objects on which they rested with admiring gaze; and as she called the attention of her companions to the glories of the setting sun, then illuminating the mountain tops, she presented a beautiful personification of Youth and Hope. After descending the marble steps, threading the meanders of the parterre, inhaling the fragrance of the flowers, and pausing to watch the gentle babblings of the fountain, the trio entered one of the trellised walks which led to the Chapel of "Our Lady of the Mount" already noticed. The novice ascended the steep path, leaving the care of the invalid to her companion, who, placing her carefully on a seat of turf, took one at her feet.

"Proceed, dear mother," she said earnestly: "I love to hear you describe your early sports and playmates; but surely my stately aunt was not one of the frolic band—*she* never could have been young?"

"Ay, my daughter, and beautiful."

"Nay, now thoujestest—that awful brow never could have been comely."

"She was more; she was kind and charitable, dutiful and wise."

The Princess's countenance betrayed considerable emotion as she asked earnestly,—

"And what was the mighty cause which changed the true and gentle to, alas!" she stopped; then, as she knelt before her, she took both hands of the nun, and added in a low and solemn tone, "Oh, dearest mother, and it is no light question, tell me why the Queen of Hungary renounced her royal estate for the cloister—why she finds no pardon in penance, no peace in prayer?"

"Alas, my child, you know not what you ask. Why should I freeze your life-blood by a narrative of the crimes of your race—why cloud your sunny youth?"

"Mother," interrupted the Princess with mournful dignity, "royalty has no youth. I have woven my last garland from the flowery meads of childhood, henceforth I must act—perchance suffer. Moreover, have you not always promised to relate the history of my grandsire's murder ere I left the convent? And think how soon—"

"Alas, too soon! In a few weeks we shall lose the sunbeam of our dwelling. Thus let it be! I will profit by the earliest opportunity of fulfilling my promise, for my stay may be yet more brief than thine!"

"And Gertruda?" asked the Princess, pointing to the Mount where the novice still knelt.

"Leave her to her prayers; she will need their aid. Moreover, I would not that she heard the direful tale. That which might serve as a beacon to you amongst the peopled walks of life would fill the solitude of the cloister with images which would sadden, but not instruct."

"I scarcely wish to hear aught which Gertruda may not share," said the Princess sorrowfully.

"You must both learn the hard task of separation, my beloved pupil. The path you have hitherto so lovingly trodden together will soon diverge—yours leading to the high places of the earth, poor Gertruda's deeper and deeper into monastic shade."

"Dearest mother, why should we part? why will you separate us? why doom Gertruda to so terrible a sacrifice?"

The nun interrupted the pleader. "We will talk of this when you have heard the history you have conjured me to relate."

"Begin, I pray; behold me all attent!"

"Not now, not *here*, my child. It is only in the gloom and privacy of my cell, and after I have implored strength from above, that I can relate the direful tale. Come to me tomorrow evening, when Gertruda is with the sisters in the choir; here, amid these lovely scenes, we will discuss a

subject more in unison with them, and speak of the future rather than the past. I would seek with a mother's interest to know if your heart accompanies your august father's disposal of your hand?"

"I am a daughter of the house of Hapsburg," said the Princess Bertha, slightly colouring, "and when did such gainsay a parent's will?"

"Your tender father will never assert a will which would endanger your happiness; and thus much he has ever commanded me to tell you."

"My beloved sire asks no sacrifice of his daughter but that of leaving him," and the soft earnest gaze of the questioner could not but detect the bright glow which overspread the Princess's countenance, as she added, after a short pause, "I have but this misgiving, that my deserts fall so far short of the high privileges proposed for them. But why that heavy sigh, dear mother?"

"Perhaps I may not be so doubtful on the question of thy deserts as thou art," replied the nun affectionately; "but let me not disparage thy royal suitor; men speak of him as brave and generous, albeit somewhat hot of spirit and stubborn of will."

"Your praises are nicely balanced, dear mother; Blandina's commendations of the prince's generous protection of her persecuted people is less measured."

"My child, my child!" eagerly interrupted the Prioress, "as you value your own safety, and would not peril that of Prince John, avoid this subject; mistrustful eyes are on ye both. But I am faint and weary, and must tax the strength of both my dear daughters to lead me hence."

The novice had already quitted her turf y oratory to offer ready help; and almost borne by her two zealous supporters, the invalid reached the steps of the terrace, where she obtained more effectual help from the stout arm of the good-humoured portress, who hustled to her assistance from the side-door, at which she was distributing the alms of the convent to the daily recipients of its bounty.

The convent ! How much of mysterious interest, what visions of beauty, devotion, terror, romance, does that word call up ! At least to such as recollect the spell which the romances of Radcliffe, and still more of Scott, threw around the Christmas hearth. The last thirty years have wrought great changes in our moral as well as material world, from which even the airy regions of fiction have not escaped. The distance and even dimness which "lends enchantment to the view," has been invaded by the materialism of the present and the near : we must now see, hear, and touch for ourselves. The feudal castle has dissolved before the jail ; the feudal baron has succumbed to the ticket-of-leave convict ; and the heroine of the modern novel qualifies for the distinction by deeds which render her amenable to the laws of her country. Well, the wheel may turn round again. And yet this is more to be desired than expected, for the public taste, once vitiated, will scarcely return to simpler elements. Happy the authors—yea, happy in their obscurity and neglect—who have resisted the temptation of an endeavour to obtain popularity by such questionable means. But we now resume our story.

The portress having admitted the party through her side-door, threw open that of her parlour, which was close to it, and, arranging some cushions on a bench, invited the Princess and the invalid to repose thereon, all the while pouring out apologies for the disarray of her apartment—which truly was lumbered with a large quantity of coarse utensils, full of the broth and rye-bread destined for her pensioners. Sister Eva, for such was the conventional appellation of this important functionary, had been chosen, as well for her healthful and joyous mien, and invariable good humour, as for the ability with which she fulfilled the duties of her office. Nor were her patrons wrong in supposing that few could behold her smiling countenance and ample dimensions, at the door of the convent, without supposing them a sample of the happiness and healthfulness of the sisters within. In person she was short and fat, with a sleek, good-humoured countenance, the perennial smile on which was relieved by a certain comic expression that

imparted an air of drollery to the little commonplace jokes and aphorisms she was in the habit of uttering, and had so established her fame as a wit that the sisterhood within, as well as the recipients of her bounty without, were ever ready to laugh as soon as she opened her lips, were it to announce a *fête* or a fast, the profession of a new sister, or the death of an old. Another property of the good recluse was a habit of ascribing all the good and evil which happened, either in the convent or the world at large, to the agency of the Pope, deprecating and invoking his Holiness, even to the neglect of St. Klare herself. Sister Eva, however, might have given a more satisfactory reason for her veneration of Boniface VIII. than many other votaries at human shrines, for she had seen her idol go through the evolutions of the holy week, and knelt before him amid the hushed thousands of the seven-hilled city, and this during the few never-forgotten days, out of a life of nearly half a century, which had not been passed either in the retirement of the cloister or in the wild solitude of her father's tower on the "castled crags" of the Rhine. The impression which such a scene of pontifical ceremonial was calculated to make on any youthful mind was deepened by gratitude on that of the simple German girl. It is needless to tell the how and the why Rowena von Rheinstadt was destined to owe to the bounty of the Pope the portion which enabled her, together with five other consecrated vestals, to become the bride of heaven (thus irreverently named) on the day her sister and an equal number of companions were dowered, by the same munificent hand, for their earthly espousals. Such was the annual bounty of the Bishops of Rome; and the twelve brides might, until lately, have been seen in their white veils and floral crowns on the anniversary of the Annunciation in the identical church in which Rowena and her sister knelt five hundred years ago. The visit of the Princess, together with that of her preceptress, who held the rank next to the abbess, was an honour Sister Eva had seldom received; therefore, was she more sensible of the condescension of the former, when requested to summon her pensioners to receive their daily

benefaction ; "in order," the young lady graciously intimated, "that she might learn from Sister Eva's cheerful readiness the grace, as well as the business, of almsgiving." No command was ever more promptly obeyed, for our good sister, although she had been nearly thirty years vowed to poverty and humility, had a great lust of applause ; and here was an opportunity both of increasing her importance and gratifying it, since she should at the same time show off her pensioners to the Princess, and the Princess to her pensioners.

"It being your command, my gracious Princess," she said, bowing very gracefully, "I must of necessity obey ; but, if I bid my poor folk to your presence, you must graciously excuse their rustic breeding. Bless the Pope ! what a jubilee it will be to them !"

Away she shuffled, reappearing shortly after at the head of a motley group of the lame, the halt, and the blind, whom, having arranged in front of the door, she summoned in turn to receive their allotted portion of broth and rye-bread, Gertruda duly and reverently handing them to her. After having disposed of a considerable quantity with her usual cheerful volubility, her countenance assumed an arch gravity as she turned towards a shrewd little urchin who had crept to her side, and exclaimed,—

"Art thou here, Gotloss ? Thou mayest, then, take this confection unto thy grandame, so grievously afflicted with the phthisic, but, in so doing, forbear to taste thyself thereof. For, observe ! in thrusting thy small digits into the sweetmeat thou committest as grievous a sin as if thou didst slide them into thy neighbour's pocket."

The boy took the confection and the counsel, but, considering them, even united, as no equivalent for his usual share of more substantial benefits, he remained, his eye fixed on the busy almoner until she had dismissed nearly all her pensioners and could no longer forbear noticing him.

"Thou lazy loiterer !" said she, "did I not bid thee depart with thy grandame's confection ?"

"An please ye, reverend madam," answered the boy, with mock submission, "I thought I might as lief tarry a bit, and take the soup and bread along wi' it."

"Thou'rt a cunning varlet," said the nun, who proved, by a certain internal giggle, and the weight of the boy's pitcher, that she could take as well as make a joke.

The next pensioner did not meet with the same indulgence—a miserable cripple bent together with age and disease. The hunger and distress which had enabled him to bear an excruciating walk, or drag, of two miles had not, pressing as they were, given him courage to bring forward his claims before the scrutinizing almoner, and he shrank back as she exclaimed,—

"How now, Hans, how didst thou come hither? I thought that thou didst plead thy lameness in excuse for attending mass; yet, the convent and the chapel are not so far apart that if thou canst walk to the one for food for thy body, thou couldst surely contrive to crawl to the other for the nourishment of thy soul. Away wi' thee, thou glutton; there's no soup for thee to-day! If thou wilt not observe the festivals of the Church—bless the Pope!—thou must be made to keep the fasts."

Whatever grounds the nun had for her accusation, the poor man's shrivelled limbs and woful countenance betrayed none of the usual signs of intemperance. Such, too, must have been the Princess's impression, or she would have been too considerate to cloud Sister Eva's little triumph by detaining Hans, and crossing his hand with a gold piece, which rendered him independent of her bounty. It remained on his distended palm, as if his shrivelled fingers had not power to close on it.

"Take it, Hans," said the Prioress; "the Princess gives it thee. There, close thy hand, or thou wilt drop her bounty. Now thank the gracious donor, and go buy thyself a sup of wine, and a morsel of bread, at the Pilgrims' stall yonder."

Tears fell in showers from poor Hans' aged eyes, as he stammered out his thanks. "May Heaven bless you, my royal and gracious Princess! Your Highness resembles in

favour one who, in her early years, was fair and gentle too. May our blessed Mother and the Angels keep you from evil counsels and evil deeds!"

The Prioress saw the storm gathering on Eva's brow, and judged the best way to avert its explosion was to hasten the departure of the poor cripple, and then to take her own leave. Summoning one of the lay sisters to the aid of Hans, she expressed her thanks to Sister Eva for the rest she had afforded her, and asked the further loan of her arm in helping her to her cell. At the same time, the Princess and the novice hastened, as was their wont, to pay their duty to the Dowager Queen of Hungary, whom we must in future designate the Abbess of Koenigsfelden, it having been her pleasure to assume that title, together with the rule of the Poor Sisters of St. Klare.

CHAPTER III.

THE QUEEN-ABBESS.

Thus Hecla rears his awful crest,
Robed in perpetual snow;
Though deep within his heaving breast
Volcanic fires glow.

THE apartment known in the convent as the Abbess's Parlour, and, at the period to which our history refers, occupied by the once powerful and beautiful Agnes, Queen of Hungary, was both lofty and spacious, and fitted up with characteristic magnificence. The ceiling was of carved oak, and the panels bordered with elaborate workmanship. The walls were furthermore decorated with fresco paintings representing subjects taken from the legendary history of the Romish saints, in which the gloomy taste of the artist or his patroness was evidenced by the selection of such as were of a painful nature. Suspended over one compartment, a curtain of black cloth concealed the entrance into the private chambers of the Superior; a locality which the imagination of the younger nuns failed not to invest with deeper horrors, on account of the fearful shrieks—so it was whispered amongst them—which were sometimes heard in the stillness of night to issue from them—apartments never entered but by the Abbess herself, and one nun on whom she bestowed her especial confidence.

Notwithstanding that the outer room was sufficiently lighted by an arched window of stained glass, which shed a rich and chastened glow throughout its ample dimensions, few ever entered that chamber without a quickened pulse and sinking spirit—something of that mysterious thrill which the traveller experiences when he descends into the cemetery of St. Calixton, or inhales the pent air of the Egyptian Pyramids. Nor was the stately Isis-like occupant calculated to soothe the intruder's

agitated spirits. It was not merely to the majestic dignity of her form, though in height and proportion it almost reached the heroic—still less to the symmetrical moulding of her features, that this extraordinary woman owed the appalling effect her appearance produced on all of mortal mould; rather might it be attributable to the stone-like repose which pervaded her whole being. She appeared amongst common mortals like a deity, whose nature had no affinity with theirs, and who could only be propitiated by the sacrifices her worship prescribed. Age had not wrinkled, it had petrified her; Time had not withered, it had hardened her. She stood alone—calm, self-sustained, like a vestige of years gone by, in an age with whose usages and interests she had no concern. The total absence of colouring on the countenance of the Abbess, her faintly-traced eyebrows, the linen band which, concealing her hair, was scarcely to be distinguished from the pale forehead round which it was bound, and the flowing and undefined lines of her white monastic habit, increased the statue-like resemblance. On one side of the high-backed ebony chair on which the Abbess sat stood an attendant, whose dark complexion and motionless form—to carry on the fanciful illustration—might have represented an Egyptian priestess watching the sacred lamp in the temple of her idol. But our young Princess had, we ween, little heart for such imaginative speculations as she knelt with Gertruda to receive the Abbess's evening benediction pronounced over their bended heads. When they arose, the attendant placed for the Princess a seat, whilst her companion stood at her side. A pause followed, after which the Abbess spoke. Her voice was low and monotonous, and her countenance retained its marble rigidity.

“My niece,” she said, “I have received a mandate for thy removal from these sheltering walls. I had hoped thou wouldest have remained as my successor in the rule of this convent when I shall be laid within its cloisters; but thy august father wills it otherwise. He is soon to return, as thou knowest, and will claim thee at my hands to place thee among the high ones of the earth. So be it! The daughters of Hapsburg have ever

been ready to sacrifice their own desires to the will of their parents. The hawk broods not in the bower of the dove."

The speaker paused; but not to ask or receive a reply. The eyes of her niece were fixed on the floor. She shrank from the gaze of those eyes, once soft and lucid as her own, which had contracted the filmy dimness of an age more than twice that to which their possessor had attained.

"Gertruda will accompany thee to the castle," continued the Abbess, "and remain there during the intervening time and the day of her profession; a day which will vow her to heaven, and thee, if it be so still willed by thy sire and kinsmen, to an earthly spouse."

During this speech Gertruda's pale cheek had become suffused with the deepest crimson; for one moment she stood trembling and irresolute, the next she advanced a step; when a look of tender reproach from her friend arrested her. The Abbess probably saw her perplexity, but with undisturbed calmness, turning to the Princess, said,—

"Thou mayest retire alone. Gertruda will remain." Then turning to the trembling girl, she added, "Speak, daughter, what wouldest thou?"

"I would entreat, reverend mother, for permission to remain in the convent; I——"

The power of utterance was gone, yet there was no other impediment to the finishing of her petition. The Abbess moved not; her eye fell, still and cold, on the suppliant, who had now thrown herself at her feet; and it was not until she perceived her inability to proceed that she said,—

"It is not in my power to grant thy request, daughter. The Church has decreed, and no doubt wisely, that the novice should see somewhat of the hollow pleasures of the world ere she renounce them for ever. Rise; thou hast already received my benediction."

Gertruda silently obeyed; and crossing her arms meekly on her bosom, stood trembling at her own audacity. A half-hour passed in these painful cogitations, the silence broken only by the pendulum of a clock of rare value and peculiar

construction which stood in the apartment, when a gentle knock at the door seemed, as by a spring, to move the automaton attendant, who, cautiously raising the latch, admitted Father Swithin, with his basket of choice pears, at the gathering of which our readers have already assisted. He placed them before the Abbess with a profound yet cheerful reverence "I humbly opine, most gracious madam, that his highness will not deem his desserts slighted this same fruitful season, and that your lady-abbeess-ship will approve of this bunch of grapes, which I have caused thus early to ripen in this harsh climate by an art not known to many—we're not too boastful, I would say to any, in these circumjacent." A shade, rather than a blush, of pleasure tinged the marble cheek of the Abbess as she accepted the tempting fruit; but she checked her half-lifted hand ere it conveyed one berry to her parched lips; and the pilgrim who pours on the thirsty soil of the desert a libation of the cool waters for which his very soul is athirst could alone appreciate the effort with which the poor ascetic resisted that needful refreshment. The faint tint passed away, the involuntary grasp was released, as, turning to Gertruda, she bade her bear the grapes to a sick sister. Poor Swithin's countenance fell. "I had hoped," he said, "most reverend madam, that you would have deigned to honour my poor labours by partaking of their fruit."

"Good father," replied the Abbess, "we evidence our value of a gift by the use we make of it. But I would hear anent the stripling: why does he not accompany thee?" The question puzzled the good-natured monk, therefore he ingeniously evaded it, by descanting on the wonderful progress of his scholar in pruning and grafting; his improving health, as well as his docility and contentedness. "He will, then, shortly resume his training under brother Anselmo's guidance," said the royal Agnes, with somewhat more of hesitation than she habitually used when issuing her commands. Father Swithin shook his head: "Dame Nature's book, reverend madam, is the only one whose leaves poor Henga will be willing to turn over; and if you would not lay

his head beneath her greensward you must leave him to her gentle nursing for some time to come. Verily, the lad profiteth thereby, and draws instruction that would confound wiser heads from her operations (to say naught of my own), whilst, like our blessed founder St. Francis, he makes acquaintance with all her lowly children. See how he tames the wild fowls of heaven! until, like holy St. Jerome, they will, so to speak, build their nests in his hand—as was no doubt the case with the blessed Saint”—he added, crossing himself in verification of his belief in the miracle. The Abbess repeated the holy sign, and her evident interest encouraged the old man’s garrulity on his favourite theme. “ ‘Tis sweet and marvellous,” he continued, “to hear the youngster with his gentle whistle stop the glancing lizard on the sunny wall, and to mark the creature shake its little foot with delight at the melody he makes. Nor less wondrous is it to behold him luring the spotted snake from its nest, permitting it unscathed to twine its scaly folds around his neck, as if the venomous beast would strangle him; and then—” The convulsive start of his auditor arrested the old man’s tale, and at the same moment the watchful nun significantly pointing to the door, he made his reverence, and retreated, as Agnes wildly exclaimed, “Who dares aver that *I* strangled the babe? See! see! it breathes, it struggles!” Then looking slowly around within the range of her distended eyeballs, their gaze became fixed on distance, and her whole being seemed stiffened into stone. Her attendant stood closely near, and, except that her lips moved in prayer and her eyes were occasionally raised to heaven, almost as motionless as the object of her care. Nor did she even attempt to administer a restorative until the hand she held betrayed a tremulous sensibility; then as the death-swoon gradually passed off, she gently rubbed the reviving limbs with the hermit’s specific (of which we shall learn more hereafter), until the patient fell into her encircling arms, gently breathing out, “Ay, now I bathe in rose-dew!” After remaining pillow'd in silence for some minutes on that compassionating bosom, Agnes extricated

herself from her supporter, and, seemingly unconscious of what had happened, resumed her erect posture.

We will profit by the pause to give a slight sketch of this faithful friend of the unfortunate Queen of Hungary. Sister Ethelinda, or, as she was familiarly called amongst the nuns, Sister Ethel, was of an age when beauty leaves few traces, and, if she ever possessed any, few vestiges of it remained, except in a set of pearly teeth and eyes of Asiatic form and lustre. The whiteness of the former were somewhat neutralized by their contrast with her sallow complexion, and the thin lips strained over them; whilst those lovely shaded eyes, seldom raised from the ground, had an expression of sadness that, although it harmonized with her wasted form, was evidently foreign to their native expression. Sister Ethel was early in life affianced to a young Italian of her own station and nation, named Francesco Montolivo, whom she loved with all the ardour of her affectionate soul; who returned her love, and was worthy of it. That which she at first hailed as the homage due to the gifted object of her affections—the notice of the great—proved the bane of her happiness; for with it came to her lover proposals of advancement and distinction in a path which she could not tread at his side, and in a profession which for ever separated her from it. Montolivo would have declined them all for her sake; but perhaps she feared he might one day repent the sacrifice, and she took it on herself. Unknown to her lover, the heroic girl assumed the veil in a distant convent—that of the Annunciata at Venice—and thus left him free to pursue the brilliant career open before him. Time went on, each year heaping fresh honours on the head of Francesco Montolivo. Severed from all natural ties, ambition took their place in his heart, and his betrothed bride was remembered only as the saintly nun of the Annunciata at Venice. When, after a series of almost unprecedented advancement, Francesco found himself seated in the abbatial chair of Koenigsfelden, the wretched isolation of the Abbess considerably affected him. She had

lately lost by death the only attendant she trusted, and he looked in vain amongst the remaining sisterhood for one to fill the responsible and vacated situation. They were, for the most part, composed of the relatives of those she had injured: for in doing as she thought an act of reparation she had drawn around her a set of miserable beings who could neither love nor respect her, and were but living mementoes of her past injustice and cruelty. The presence of the Prioress and her neice was torture to her; and when the reader becomes better acquainted with their wrongs and sufferings, it will be readily conceived that the Abbot's choice did not fall on them as the more immediate attendants of the cruel persecutor of their race. In this dilemma, the gentle Ethelinda, the devoted nun of the Annunciata, recurred to his recollection, and he determined to endeavour to secure her services for the lone woman for whose misfortunes she would feel, and of whose crimes she was to a great extent ignorant. It was not difficult for one of his high station in the Church to procure the exchange of Ethelinda's convent; and, although her woman's affection had not been so easily subdued as that of the ambitious prelate, delicacy, duty, and the interest she felt in her charge, enabled her to fulfil the office assigned her with undeviating integrity. But the Abbess speaks, and Ethelinda seizes the present moment to press a subject she has much at heart, and to execute a commission entrusted to her by the Abbot. The Abbess led to its object by alluding to the reluctance shown by Gertruda to leaving the convent.

"Methinks," replied her companion, in the gentlest tone, "'twere almost cruel to give that young creature a transient glimpse of life—to show her the power of her wings, and then clip them for ever."

"Thou art bold in questioning what holy Mother Church has deemed desirable, daughter."

"I would only venture to suggest—holy Maria forbid that I should dare gainsay her sacred commands!—whether, in this instance of Gertruda, they are rightly interpreted.

Remember, reverend mother, she has already entered, nay fulfilled her noviciate. Is it not before repairing to the cloister that the Church allows a leave-taking of all earthly joys by a fuller participation of them? Now, our poor child, reared in seclusion, if launched at once on a full tide of earth's delights, might, alas, be engulfed beneath their waters."

The Abbess did not answer immediately, and when she spoke it was in a tone of humility which accorded with the graceful bend of her head.

"When thou confinest thy censures to the poor nun of St. Klare, my sister, they are ever humbly received. We will forthwith take counsel of our Lord Abbot."

The summoned ~~equ~~cillor obeyed with some misgiving. Great as his power over mind and will usually was, he well knew that the mind and will of Agnes of Hapsburg were governed by an influence over which he had no control, unless he could bring it imperceptibly to bear on a firmness of purpose, a oneness of action, a sincerity of principle—alas, how distorted!—which no other power could warp or combat. The Church was the object of her idolatry. Not, be it observed, the Church of Jesus Christ, but the dominant hierarchy of Rome. Whatever could be brought to bear on her rule, whatever could be weighed in her balance, was to this her blinded votary, a sacred and imperative obligation. But Agnes was her own interpreter, and held her own scales. As far as the facilities of the age allowed, this extraordinary woman had examined the councils, canons, and decrees of her Church, and was deeply versed in its ceremonial ritual; as well as the marvellous histories of its saints and martyrs, its patrons, popes, and prelates. Agnes had no womanly weaknesses or sensibilities, and few human attachments. Her father had been deemed by her the only being to whom she owed obedience, and had been, perhaps, the only object of her respect and love; and him she had idolized with all the fervour of her fiery soul—obeyed him, living, with more than filial devotion, and avenged his cruel death with unre-

lenting and undistinguishing barbarity. Such was Agnes of Hapsburg—a type of the dark era in which she lived—firm, faithful, energetic, sincere, she possessed the germ of every noble quality; but all were marred and defaced by the influence of an all-absolute and soul-destroying superstition; her youth fettered by its chains, her womanhood stained by blood and cruelty, her age burthened by remorse and self-inflicted penance! She may be likened to a beautiful plant, that, created to shed its fragrance on the morning air and draw tints of glorious splendour from the sun, which, placed within the influence of a marshy fen, sucks in the pestiferous poison, and emits a deadly miasma on all within its influence. Such was Agnes of Hapsburg!

The conference between her and the Abbot ended, as such conferences must of necessity do, where one party is bent on rule, and the other too wise to oppose where opposition is known to be vain. It needed but half the Abbot's acuteness and knowledge of the world to point out to him the folly of trusting the young and beautiful novice to the ordeal proposed by the Abbess; and he had secretly exerted all his influence to prevent her accompanying the Princess into the world. He had inspired the timid Gertruda herself with a dread of its snares, and engaged the sympathies of the gentle Ethelinda in the hope of sparing her this needless trial, or, as she but too justly feared, a future of regret. But to talk of regret or danger to Agnes were equally vain. The world—that is, the outer world—had never allured her; why should she fear it for the dedicated Gertruda?

“I ask but one question, reverend father,” she said, in an accent rather of command than interrogation; “does not holy Mother Church enjoin this preparatory trial of the vain pleasures of the world before taking the veil and the final vows?”

“She permits it.”

“Then Gertruda will accompany the Princess Bertha to the castle, when she herself returns thither to welcome her royal father; and to your zealous watchfulness, my lord abbot, I trust them both.”

CHAPTER IV.

AN O'ER TRUE TALE.

Treu bis an der Todt.—HERALDIC MOTTO.

ALTHOUGH the gentle Prioress shrank from the harrowing task of awakening the memories of the past, she felt, now her beloved pupil was about to enter the world where concealment would be impossible, it was a sacred duty to draw aside the curtain from some dark passages in the history of her race, though it was with a trembling hand. At the hour appointed, the Princess, herself pale and agitated, threaded the long passage that led to the nun's cell, and took an offered seat on the pallet which nearly filled its narrow dimensions.

The Prioress, as if afraid to exhaust the little strength she had collected on any other subject, opened at once on that which had brought them together.

“ You have often questioned me, my beloved pupil, on the events of my early life as connected with the court of your grandfather, in which my sister and myself were brought up, first as playmates, and at which we afterwards remained as attendants on your royal aunts. It seems as a long-past dream to recall the bright sister-band and the throng of knights and demesels which made the ancient castle ring with merriment; for the Emperor was as indulgent to his children as he was stern and tyrannical to all else. You know, doubtless, he was not the only son of the great Rudolph. Besides his favourite Hartman, the hero lived to lay another son, and that his youngest, in an untimely grave.

This last left a young widow, who, after giving birth to a son, retired to a convent, and died of grief. The Emperor Rudolph, during the few remaining years of his life, cherished this orphan grandson, and dying, bequeathed him to the guardianship of his son, Albert, the eldest uncle of the ill-fated child."

"Speak you of John of Swabia—the regicide?" interrupted the Princess, deeply colouring.

"Ay, daughter, the regicide! for such, alas! he was. I know men deem it blasphemy to utter his name, or breathe one pitying prayer for him or his wretched associates; but since you, my child, desire to hear the dreadful consummation, it is but righteous that you should also listen to the wrongs which impelled it. I have said that Rudolph bequeathed his orphan grandchild to the care of his uncle, together with the ample possessions with which he was endowed, solemnly adjuring him to give the boy the place of an heir at his board and a child in his heart—to educate him with his own children—prudently to husband his patrimony, and to put him in possession of it when arrived at man's estate. Albert solemnly pledged himself to fulfil his sire's requisitions, and obey his injunctions, and the soul of the great Rudolph passed away unclouded with doubt. Scarcely, however, were his obsequies over ere his cherished grandson was banished the court to the castle of his tutor, the Baron von Eschenbourg, where he was brought up in obscurity, and denied, as he grew to man's estate, all opportunity of asserting his birthright: his unjust guardian applying his ample revenues to the aggrandisement of his own children; whilst the few attendants allowed to the wronged owner were scantily maintained and meanly paid. I know what that speaking look would ask, my Bertha," continued the narrator, the indignant accent of her voice softening to the tones of affection. "Your father was always kind and just, but he had little influence with the Emperor, who was swayed by spirits more like his own—Leopold, whose fiery temper never brooked control, and Agnes, who alone remained unmarried of the

sister-band. Moreover, let me here add to the comforting of your filial love, that your sire, having offended the Emperor by bestowing his hand on your lovely mother, who alone had possession of his heart, was banished from the court during the principal period of my history. The Archduchess Agnes, your aunt—afterwards the wife and widow of the King of Hungary, and now our reverend abbess—was born to command!” And here, suiting the action to the word, the nun raised her drooping form, her large eyes dilated, and she continued with clearer enunciation, “Majestic as the eagle when he poises in mid-air; graceful as the swan when she glides through the dividing water. Nor was it outward form, or even inborn qualities alone, in which she was pre-eminent: she was learned above most of her age and sex. Her life, dating from early youth, was spent in charitable deeds and exercises of devotion. She turned coldly from worldly pleasures and earthly loves: the chase, the dance, the tournament, had no charms to lure her from the confessional or the altar. Often have I followed her as she stole from the social circle into the chapel, where—tearing the jewels from her queenly brow—I have beheld her prostrate herself before the host, and lick the dust in expiation of a moment’s harmless merriment. The Empress—a zealous daughter of the Church—encouraged Agnes’s wish for the veil, promising to raise an abbey as her dower: little deeming it would so soon be her husband’s tomb! And I, too, how far was I from even dreaming, when, in girlish playfulness, she promised that I should rank second in her rule, that promise should be kept under circumstances so dire !”

“But surely,” interrupted the Princess, “my aunt departed from her early vows when she wedded the King of Hungary?”

“It was a sore trial to her; but the Emperor’s will was more binding on his daughter even than that of God, and motives of state policy induced him to snatch the veil from his daughter’s head, to place on it a queenly crown. But the heart

of Agnes was no traitor to her first and only love, and when after a few years she returned, widowed and childless, to her father's court, she supplicated for permission to renew her early vows. But I have gone too far onward in my history. I should say that about the time of the Queen of Hungary's espousals, my beloved sister had consented to reward the long-tried constancy of the Baron von Wart, who, with our kinsman, the Lord of Balm, and the Baron von Eschenbach, his tutor, were attached adherents of the unfortunate John of Swabia, the neglected nephew and defrauded ward of the Emperor. Both brides were desirous that I should accompany them to their future homes. I chose the humbler one of my sister, and took up my abode in her husband's castle, which was situated near that of Eschenbach. It was here I first saw the Prince. His other attached friends also lived in the neighbourhood, and a constant intercourse was kept up between them; each one in turn becoming the guest or host of the others, whilst Prince John was the honoured inmate of all—sometimes remaining with the ladies whilst their lords left them, at the mandate of the Emperor, to take a part in his wars. The poor outcast felt his wrongs most deeply, although silently; yet, when witnessing the warm welcome which greeted the chieftains' return, the honest homage of the vassal, the tenderness of wife or child, he has sometimes uttered the wish that he had been born a subject. What marvel then, that he should seek an alliance with the generous friends, whose happy liberty he coveted! My brother-in-law and our kinsman, of Balm refused their immediate sanction to our union. 'Our present object, my Prince,' they would say, 'is to instal you in your rights; let it not be said we did it for the aggrandizement of our own families.' But we were left free to meet in the society of our common friends, and we were too sure of each other's faith, and too happy in the present, to fear the future. Ah, those were days of almost unmixed delight to my dearly-loved sister and myself, for we recked not the dark current that rolled beneath. After three years thus passed, a breath of war stirred the first leaf in our bower of bliss, and then came a herald to

command our barons to go to meet the Emperor, in battle array, at Baden, and claiming their assistance in subjecting the rebel cantons. No summons came for Prince John, but it had been determined that he should accompany his tutor and friends, and make a public appeal for the justice refused to their private demands. 'If the Emperor,' they said, 'turn the deaf ear to our righteous claims in his cabinet, we will proclaim them loud enough in his assembled court to ring through every land of Christendom.' I trembled as I saw the light of their fiery eyes, the clenched fist, the backward toss of the haughty head, as these devoted friends spoke of maintaining the rights of their almost idolized Prince. I saw also that anger at the oppression had generated hatred towards the oppressor; and that they talked of revenge until it was looked on as a virtue, and of endurance as another name for cowardice. But the gentle spirit of the Prince entered not into their feelings, and I observed he was not generally admitted into their councils. The situation of my sister—then in the near expectation of the birth of her second child—prevented her accompanying her lord, and I staid to nurse and cheer her. Alas! I was little suited to the task. As we stood together on the terrace of the castle, to watch the departure of the gallant band—the beautiful! the brave!—an undefined but acute anguish took possession of my soul. I do believe, my daughter, that Heaven sometimes, in mercy opens the future before our mind's eye, to prepare us for its dreadful realities. Yet, what forebodings could have pictured such as we were about to realize! A circumstance, though trifling in itself, might have deepened mine. As the martial band, in gallant array, defiled down the steep heights on which the castle stood, a bell from the neighbouring chapel mingled with the trumpets' clang, and a funeral procession crossed the path below. Just then, Prince John, who was somewhat in advance, turned an abrupt angle which led into it—his horse started and threw his rider, who had heedlessly turned to give a parting look homeward. He was, however, unhurt. Springing again into the saddle, he waved an adieu, and, followed by the whole

troop, the road was speedily crossed, and naught was seen but the funeral train slowly wending its way to the quiet graveyard on the hill. Oh, my beloved child, how wilt thou bear to trace with me the dark and thorny journey which lay before my gentle sister, ere she reached that blissful resting-place ! The remainder of that day I strove in vain for composure ; but my sister was calm and hopeful. The next day, she proposed our visiting the Baroness von Eschenbach, who detained us yet another, and accompanied us back on the third. As we alighted from our horses, in the court, the aged seneschal caught hold of my robe to prevent me following my companions into the castle, and beckoned me to follow him. I did so ; and, walking as fast as his tottering limbs would carry him, he led the way into the wood of venerable trees that then clothed the steep descent leading to the stream of the Limmat, until their pendent branches were bathed in its waves. After following the main road for some distance, he pointed, with a trembling finger, to a narrow side-path conducting to a fishing-hut on the river's brink. I asked no questions ; even if I had dared to meet the dreaded reply, my tongue would have denied them utterance. I read it in the glazed eye, the clasped hands of the faithful Hubert, who threw himself on his knees as I darted down the steep declivity. I know not how I reached the hut. It was a spring twilight ; the stars had not yet appeared, and my way was further darkened by the thick overhanging branches. My first recollection was of a muffled figure standing in the porch, but no disguise could have concealed the object of my forebodings. I knew it was the Prince. I knew he was come to disclose some direful tidings ; perhaps, to bid a last farewell. All was revealed to me in that mysterious moment ; in the next, the wretched John of Swabia was kneeling at my feet. I looked on him with a vacant eye. I stretched forth an ice-cold hand to raise him. 'Touch me not, Adelaide,' he exclaimed, in a voice whose hollow accents ring evermore in my ears ; 'the blood, the kindred blood of the Lord's anointed is on my hand ! But, oh, my angel love ! I could not leave thee for ever without telling thee how deep,

how imperishable my love for thee has been, and evermore will abide ! Pray for me ! oh, pray for one who dares not pray for himself ! ' He lifted the corner of my robe to his lips and vanished. I tried to cry after him, and entreat him to stop. I wished, at least, to tell him that my future life should be spent in supplicating pardon for his crime, however great. He heard me not, and the stars were the only created witnesses of the vow I made—a vow of life-long penance and prayer ; and, as far as human weakness has permitted, I have kept that vow. And oh ! " continued the narrator, with clasped hands and upraised eyes, and in utter absorption of spirit, " Thou who bore unanswered but by prayer and blessing the injuries of Thine enemies, pardon the guilty deed, provoked by bitter wrong, and followed by long years of suffering and repentance. Sustain him in his abasement, comfort him in his exile ; let my prayers, my vigils, plead in his behalf, and Thy precious sacrifice wash white the guilty stain from his soul ! " Then burying her face in her hands, the tears trickled through her slender fingers, whilst her fragile form rocked to and fro with irrepressible emotion. The Princess gently raised the mourner, and, pressing her head against her bosom, tears were for some time the only, as they were the most soothing, testimony of her sympathy. " As the seneschal had, for reasons known to us both, prevented immediate search being made for me," resumed the nun, " it was not till some hours after that the servants from the castle found me stretched on the ground nearly insensible, and wet with the night dew. The intelligence of my sister's danger aroused me to consciousness and action. Some vague rumours had reached her in spite of the seneschal's caution, and brought on those pangs which were almost unheeded amid severer woe, and an unfortunate yet precious infant was sent us in this dark hour." Here the Princess turned on the narrator an inquiring look. " It is even so ; that babe was the brother of our Gertruda. Poor child ! he was cradled in woe and disaster—the heritor of sorrow, but not, God be praised ! of guilt. The bloody fact of the Emperor's murder, and the flight of the conspirators, soon

reached us, with the announcement of the quick following vengeance of the Empress and her children. It would seem that their grief knew no solace but in the misery they inflicted on the innocent : the guilty had fled beyond the reach of their vengeance. Agnes, and her brother Leopold, scoured the country, converting it into one vast burning pyre to the memory of their murdered parent. On the first rumour of their approach, the benevolent Baroness von Eschenbach returned to her castle, taking with her the new-born babe and his nurse ; but it was not till the shrieks of the perishing and the clang of the avenger's trumpet were heard, that a few faithful followers bore the wife and little daughter of Von Wart to a cottage occupied by the wife of the seneschal in a distant forest, whither I accompanied her on foot by the side of their litter. An hour after, the Castle of Falkenstein, late the abode of hospitality and happiness, was in flames ; some of its brave defenders buried in its ruins, the rest, more unfortunate still, reserved to glut the savage revenge of—pardon me, dear daughter, you compelled me to this recital, and even now I would desist, for I warn you that these crimson facts paled before others which reached us a long time after."

" And yet I would beseech you, dear mother, harrowing as they may be, not to hide them from me, unless my selfish eagerness tax your sensitive spirit and feeble strength too heavily."

After a short pause, the narrator continued her sad tale.

" I know not how many weeks, or even months, crawled on in our forest hiding-place—the memory of which, even at this distant period, is torture—when one evening my brother-in-law's favourite page crept to our door—the disguise of a pedlar. Noble, yet ill-fated youth ! he risked more than his life in thus searching for the wife of his master. Alas, alas, brave Russeling ! my heart bleeds when I think on thy hard fate—thy youthful form torn by the torturer's pincers in the vain effort to shake thy constant soul, or to force from thy truthful lips aught that could criminate thy guiltless lord. For thee, too, have I watched, and prayed, and wept. But I anticipate ;

and I must hasten from Russeling's after-sufferings, to give you his account, then first learnt by ourselves, of that dire deed which turned our fair heritage of earth into a howling wilderness. I will try to relate it briefly, for my strength begins to fail, and the night wears. On that fatal day, already alluded to, when the Prince and his barons left us to join the Emperor at Baden, they were stopped at the gates of the town to give place to him and his suite, who unfortunately arrived at the same moment. At the head of the numerous train of the Austrian chivalry, and occupying the station which poor Prince John should by his birthright have filled,—decked, too, in his hereditary jewels,—rode his cousin, Archduke Leopold. The hatred borne by this vindictive young man towards his cousin was well known, and was such as the injurer alone bears to his victim. On this day it was ostentatiously manifested in the scorn which curled his lip as he rode past him, without the courtesy of recognition. The friends of Prince John exchanged looks of defiance, and some even laid their hands on the hilts of their swords; whilst he looked not up, and his head sank on his bosom as if he dared not face the insulting pageant. His faithful followers looked on him with indignant surprise, and crowded round him, both to conceal his abstraction and to rouse him to energy and self-respect: and as the stern Baron von Eschenbach rode by the Prince's side through the streets of Baden, he was overheard to utter words of bitter rebuke. We know not what passed at a council held on their arrival by Prince John's adherents; not one of that noble but misguided band remained to tell the secret; but shortly after they and their leader rode up the steep ascent, on the top of which stands the royal castle of Baden, in which Albert was to hold his farewell banquet. How little did he anticipate it was the last of which he should ever partake! This day, the Emperor presided in person. On either side sat his sons, Albert and Leopold, and the seat next the former was destined for Prince John, but he left it vacant, and placed himself in the midst of his own adherents. The company was numerous, and yet

distinguished, and the entertainment more than ordinarily sumptuous. Immediately before the royal party was placed a curiously-wrought model of the castle and tower of Hapsburgh, on the top of which, of the size and colouring of life, was appended a hawk, holding in its beak a garland of the golden Immortelles, tied with bunches of black ribbon, representing, as thou wilt perceive, the crest and colours of thy house. I have a reason for being thus minute in describing what may appear to thee worthy of little note amid graver matters; therefore, dear daughter, I prithee heed it."

The Princess could only bow assent, for her emotion was too deep for words; and the narration was continued with such feverish rapidity, as if strength, and even breath, would fail ere it was completed.

"Though the cheer, as I have said, was abundant, and the wine-cup was deeply drained, yet the spirits of the guests rose not. A deep gloom sat on Albert's brow, and its murky shade spread wider and wider until it reached far below the dais, to the furthest end of the banqueting-board, and silenced even the mirth of the boy pages. But the universal stupor gave place to intense interest, as, on an order being given to prepare the parting cup, Prince John rose from his seat, and demanded of the Emperor a few minutes' audience. The whole bearing of John had undergone a mighty change since the depression of the morning. A feeling of self-respect and of unprovoked injustice had changed the lamb into a lion. He stood erect, with open brow, firm in the justice of his cause, and, in a voice that penetrated to the remotest corner of the vast hall, entered into a calm, unexaggerated history of his wrongs. He addressed the Emperor as his liege lord and nearest kinsman, and expressed his hearty desire to aid him in the coming war, if restored to his rightful place, now usurped by his cousin Leopold. He related the story of his birth; the early death of both his parents; the sacred trust of guardianship bequeathed by his grandsire. And then, though the frown deepened on the grim visage of the treacherous guardian, and the scorn which had curled the lips of

Leopold changed to the quiver of rage and shame, he told of his neglected childhood, his banished youth, and ended by demanding the restoration of his withheld patrimony and usurped rights. He ceased; but ere the Emperor replied the attention of the assembly was drawn to a low wail, which proceeded from the shield of the great Rudolph, which hung on the wall; and many a stout heart quailed as the ponderous metal, after rocking backward and forward, fell with a loud crash to the ground! The Emperor waxed deadly pale, but moved not from his place; and whilst his sons hastened to assist in replacing the fallen shield, he deliberately unfastened the garland I have described from the hawk's beak, and threw it towards his nephew, with the bitter gibe that rang his own death-knell: 'Take this, young man; an ornament more befitting thee than casque or helm.' The insult was perceived and felt by all, but most keenly by the Prince's adherents, who tossed the insulting garland from sword to sword until it was, in all probability, trodden under foot and destroyed. Albert immediately left the hall, and, attended by his court, proceeded through the town to the border of the river, where a small boat was in readiness to carry him across to the opposite side. Either by accident or design—there is One above who alone can tell—the Emperor, separated from his own party, entered the boat, followed by his nephew, Prince John, the Barons Eschenbach, Wart, and Balm, the Knight Tegerfield, our poor Russeling, and one of his own attendants. Time has thrown no light on this dark passage. Russeling could only relate that, obeying the orders of his master, he had forced an entrance for himself into the boat, and after reaching the opposite bank had staid behind a few minutes to secure the light craft from being carried away by the confluent streams. A few minutes! Oh, when did time in its flight through ages behold such wild devastation; and that in one of the fairest heritages of earth! The howling blast of human passion had passed by; and when Russeling reached the meadow just above the meeting of the waters, he found only the mangled form of the dying monarch and his

own master, who pointing to the piteous spectacle, declared himself guiltless of the deed, and bade him seek his safety in flight. The guilty rest had fled. From that hour no honest man has sheltered their weary bodies, no affection soothed the afflicted souls, no pardon healed their torn consciences. They have wandered, like the first murderer, through alien lands—branded, despised, forsaken."

"And my grandfather?" asked the awe-struck listener anxious to turn the tide of convulsive emotions.

"Abandoned alike by his assassins and his own affrighted attendant, the Emperor must have breathed his last on the sod which reeked with his blood but for the courageous tenderness of a peasant woman who passed that way accidentally, as men phrase it. She sat until the sun sunk behind the mountains, supporting the dying monarch's head on her bosom, vainly endeavouring to staunch his ebbing life-blood with her long tresses. That young woman was the daughter of our faithful seneschal, and your old friend Dame Hedwig his wife, our humble protectors in the forest hut."

"Dame Hedwig, Henga's grandame?" asked the Princess pleased as well as surprised at the discovery.

"We will speak more of this hereafter."

"One query more: did Russeling bring you tidings of your sister's babe?"

"He did, but they were too vague and harassing to be confided to his poor mother, and he imparted them secretly to me. You will remember how generously the Baroness Eschenbach took charge of the babe in our hour of need. Russeling related that amid the sack and burning of the Castle of Eschenbach, as Agnes ran wildly like a destroying fiend from room to room, she discovered a cradle in which lay a sleeping babe, in a dark corner in which it had doubtless been placed for concealment. Tearing the innocent slumber from its couch, she pressed her blood-stained fingers on its velvet throat, and but for the interference of some soldiers—men of blood, but less savage than this daughter of kings—"

"And that babe—oh, dearest mother," exclaimed Bertha, clasping her hands in horror, "was it your infant nephew? and what was its fate?"

"That remained long unknown to us. Russeling said people in general believed it to be the infant heir of Eschenbach; but he was older—but you shall hear further of its fate. I will now continue my melancholy tale. The page staid with us but a few hours, and departed to join his master where he had sought refuge in the house of a relative, Count Diebolten von Blamont, who afterwards cruelly betrayed him into the hands of those who thirsted for his blood. The poor boy and his master never met. Russeling was taken, tortured, executed; but let me not repeat the soul-distracting tale! Although it was some relief to his wife to know the hunted fugitive had found even a temporary hiding-place, yet she mistrusted the character of the kinsman under whose roof he had sought it, and the known avarice of his wife, and but too surely foreboded the fatal result. After the visit of Russeling, an evident change came over her gentle spirit. She was silent, abstracted, restless. For whole days she wandered about the forest alone, and at her return would avoid all communion with the sister who had hitherto shared her every thought, and even turn from the caresses of our little darling."

"Gertruda?"

"Ay, your friend Gertruda, the heritor of early sorrow."

"And dearer, if possible, is she to my heart for this additional claim on it. But go on, dearest mother."

The Prioress did so, and thus continued: "I perceived my sister's mind was dwelling on some project, into which she meant not that I should penetrate, and I forbore to thwart her humour by seeking her confidence. Indeed, at that time, I had, most mercifully, little leisure for reflection, for besides the charge of our little Gertruda, a change in our household threw all its cares on me. Dame Hedwig, the wife of our faithful seneschal, was just then called away to the death-bed of her child, who lived only to give birth to a sickly

and deformed infant whom she remained to nurse. This daughter was, as you know, the poor woman who so courageously supported the dying Emperor. It is believed her life, and the feebleness and deformity of her infant, were the sacrifices of her humane intrepidity, for she was never known to smile afterward, and always predicted her death as it happened."

"It is, then, to the services of his mother that poor Henga owes his high standing in the grace of the Abbess?"

"So men believe; of this you shall hear more anon; I must first go back to our hiding-place in the forest. The few articles of absolute necessity which we consumed, besides the grain and pulse of our garden and the milk of our goats, had to be procured from a small town at two leagues' distance, whither our hostess went every month to purchase them. When she left us, my sister eagerly proposed to fill her place, and dressed as the female peasants of the district, in spite of my earnest remonstrances, she set off at break of day, with a kind neighbour who promised to aid in bringing home our scanty store of provisions, leaving me to watch over our precious Gertruda. The last time my eyes rested on my sister's still lovely countenance, though then faded and sorrow-worn—the last time she breathed a mother's blessing on her child was as I stood at the door of the hut holding her in my arms; and then I watched her footsteps until her receding form was lost in the recesses of the forest. That night I watched for her return in vain. Early the next morning, the neighbour who had accompanied her brought home our little basket of provisions, and a little packet containing my Gertruda's wedding-ring, on which is engraved the motto of her husband's house, 'True, even until death.' The neighbour related that, as they approached the town, they heard the tramp of horses and the clang of martial music. People were hastening towards it from all directions. Replying hastily to my poor sister's eager inquiries, 'It is Queen Agnes and Duke Leopold,' said one. 'It is soldiers conveying

a prisoner to the rack,' said another. Gertruda sank to the ground, pale and trembling. Her pitying companion, though ignorant of the exact cause of her agitation, yet imagining it was in some way connected with the tumult around, begged her to remain at rest whilst she went into the town to gain further information, and to purchase their joint provisions. At first my sister acquiesced; but calling the kind creature back ere she had gone many steps, she bade her, should she not find her on her return, to convey her basket of provisions to me, together with the little packet already mentioned. The poor woman remarked, as she helped her to conceal it under her dress, that my Gertruda's hand trembled exceedingly; that 'she was as white as a lily, but did not shed one tear,' and her own flowed as she related her melancholy tale. She added that, having executed her commissions as quickly as she could, she returned to the appointed place, but her companion had left it. She sought her till night approached, but in vain; and the only information she could gain was from some one who had seen a fair young peasant following the hooting crowd that had pursued the wretched prisoner."

"Could that have been the Baron von Wart?" interrupted the agitated listener.

"It was. I felt too surely it was no other, from the account of my poor neighbour, and the disappearance of my heroic sister; but months passed away before any tidings reached me of either. I do not attempt to paint my anguish! But for my helpless charge I should have followed, and braved the prison and the rack; but she, sweet cherub, was the link that bound me to life, and all that rendered life endurable. We passed many months in almost entire solitude, when our good Hedwig returned; but, amid the full contentment of seeing her again, I felt an added peril in her presence, for she brought with her a sickly infant which the Abbess had strictly charged her never to quit; thus the faithful creature tried in vain to return to us; nor could she trust a messenger with the

secret of our retreat. Providence at length opened way, by smiting the guilty Queen of Hungary in the n of her bloody career. On that dread day, when she s amid the rabble crowd, the exulting directress of the execution of sixty stainless knights, when she exclair but oh, with what a diverse meaning, in the words of martyred St. Anna, 'Now I bathe in May-dew!'^* vengeance of Heaven fell mysteriously on her, and was struck with a hidden disease, of which our most sk leeches know not the nature or the name. The at words had scarcely passed her lips (uttered as she poi to the block on which was laid the head of one n noble and more hateful to her than his brother victim than she was struck, as by the wind of the desert, speechl motionless, rigid!—her lips still apart, her eye-balls glaring, her nostrils still open. No human force or could move her from the ground on which she stood, rooted, or even bend the delicate finger that remai stretched out and pointing towards the severed head quivering trunk of her noble and innocent victim. headsman threw down his axe. The crowd, which gazed with savage curiosity and almost enjoyment, on scene of carnage, fell back in a widening circle, horror-str from the mysterious statue which stood in death-like still in their midst, unmoved by the most powerful remedies wl a crowd of quickly-summoned leeches could suggest or ap. At length, one of them remembered the wonder-working of St. Hilda, and the almost equally far-famed skill of hermit, the Father Celestine. United, they wére blessed the recovery of the Queen; but naught has availed to w off occasional attacks of the disease. A word whose im may be hidden from all beside—the breath of a flower— hum of an insect—the burden of a song—will someti touch the secret spring, and stop the current of her bl Our Lord Abbot, as perchance thou knowest, maintains t

* Historical.

these fearful sicknesses are ecstatic trances in which the Abbess holds communion with the angels and saints ; but the subject is never permitted in the convent, nor should I now have dared its mention had it not been necessary to the continuance of my story. Grateful for the service done her by the hermit, Agnes invited him in after years to accept a place of honour and trust in this abbey, which she had then founded ; but the conscientious man of God answered the daughter and wife of kings in these uncourteous terms : ‘ Woman, they who shed innocent blood, and found convents with the spoils of the victims, can never be acceptable to a God who delights in mercy and forgiveness.’* But whilst peremptorily declining her offered favours, he still continued to minister to her infirmities. But I must hasten onwards, my daughter,’ continued the Prioress ; “ the midnight bell will ere long summon me to prayer ; yet were the sun now at its rising, I might talk it down ere I had unfolded half the mysterious windings of my tale.”

“ But, at least, tell what Dame Hedwig and her grandson had to do with the hermit Celestine.”

“ She was bidden by the abbess to take the babe to his cell, in which she had caused accommodation to be made for their comfortable reception, and engaged the ready consent of the holy man to dip him daily in St. Hilda’s well. It was by the help of the hermit that Hedwig was enabled to visit us in the forest ; but she could stay but a few days, and left me more forlorn than before, for I missed her help and sympathy in the past ; and Gertruda pined for her little melancholy playmate, the sick baby, who never smiled but on her. I had, moreover, a constant dread of our retreat being discovered by some spy of the Queen, and kept watch day and night over my precious charge, lest she should be torn from me.

“ One night, as I sat beside her rude couch, I heard an unusual stir amongst some tall trees near our dwelling, in which the rooks had formed a colony. I extinguished my

* Historical.

light, and opened the little casement. The moon shone brightly on a venerable figure just beneath it, so unlike any my memory could recall that I felt for one moment as if it were some angelic messenger sent to watch over and protect us. And this indeed it was; for it proved to be the Hermit of St. Hilda, the good angel of all the unfortunate. He was directed to our retreat by Hedwig, who knew her secret was safe in his keeping, and how much we needed his help, which he lost no time in proffering. He came to remove us into the safer enclosure of St. Hilda's cave, and never, never was retreat more welcome. We shared the rough accommodations which I have said were prepared for Dame Hedwig and her charge, and here we passed six years, during which the mind and outward form of my sweet blossom made gracious promise."

"Ah! why, then, did you transplant her into these gloomy shades?" asked the Princess mournfully.

"There was a dire need's-be that I could not resist, and of which you shall judge," replied the nun in a tone of yet deeper depression. "The stern truths uttered by the venerable hermit had sunk deep into the heart of Agnes, and his rejection of her offer had wounded her conscience even more than her pride. Her revenge was drowned in the blood of her enemies; her avarice and ambition had nothing more to grasp at; her health was impaired, her mind enfeebled; and she found the stately abbey she had raised peopled with the ghosts of the murdered. Remorse, too, preyed on her life-springs. Her days were spent in fastings and prayer, her nights in vigils and penance; but she found no mitigation of her sufferings. At length, at the hermit's solemn adjuration, she sought for consolation in making all the amends in her power for the evil she had done and, equally extreme in reparation as in injury, she filled her abbey with the children she had rendered homeless, and tried to perform a parent's part towards those she had made parentless. But her most ardent desire was to discover the retreat of the widow and child of Von Wart, and to meet me once again. My sister was alike beyond her love or ire, but the

hermit feared it would be in vain much longer to attempt to conceal her child and sister from the Queen's indefatigable search. He knew that his aged arm was our only earthly stay, and that the prop must ere long be taken from us. Many and bitter were the struggles ere I could consent to his revealing our secret, but it was at length unfolded. Agnes heard it with an emotion that almost endangered her life. It was a long time ere the sight of either of us could be borne by her without bringing on her fearful malady. I took the veil; what had I to do with the outward world?"

"For Gertruda's sake could you not have remained?"

The nun shook her head mournfully. "The convent is the only refuge for the proscribed—But I must finish my story. It was the pleasure of the Abbess that I should bear rule next to herself in this house; and, what was far more gratifying to me, that you, my Bertha, should be brought up under my poor instructions, linked in your daily tasks and pastimes with my own niece. I had taken the vows about two years, during which I had taught myself to believe and almost to submit to the impossibility of ever obtaining any intelligence of my sister, when the Hermit Celestine brought me this precious memento, which I now place in your hands. Take it, my daughter, for I feel the moment to be at hand when I shall be able no longer to conceal it. Hide it in the folds of your dress, and when I have told you how it came into my possession, you shall take it to your own room and peruse it there, for I must seek to calm my agitated spirit by prayer and retirement." Bertha would now have retired, but the nun detained her. "I wish to leave nothing unsaid now; I will therefore confide to you what is known only to one beside—my more than friend, my constant benefactor, the Hermit of St. Hilda. The manuscript I have now torn from the heart to which it has for many a long year been pressed contains the details of my martyred sister's sufferings after we parted, in a letter addressed to me, and confided to the care of our kinswoman the Prioress of Klingenthal. This noble woman, though she knew evil eyes watched her steps, at

the peril of office, nay, even of life, received and solaced the denounced outcast till she died; but rumours having gone abroad respecting her mysterious inmate, she dared not make any inquiry after my abode, or convey to me the letter confided to her by my dying sister. She, however, carefully concealed it until, knowing her own end to be approaching, she summoned the Hermit, and entreated him, with many a prayer and caution, to convey it to me."

The clock of the convent now struck twelve, and whilst the bell for midnight prayer prolonged the sound, the friends remained in mournful abstraction. Then came the flittings of the sisterhood, sweeping like evening breezes along the corridors; and when all had passed, the Prioress fondly embraced the weeping Bertha, and they parted.

CHAPTER V.

GERTRUDE VON WART.

Oh, lovely are ye, Love and Faith,
Enduring to the last.
She had her meed—one smile in death ;
And his worn spirit passed. HEMANS.

ALONE in the deep retirement of her chamber, Bertha, with a trembling hand and agitated spirit, opened the record of the dying Baroness von Wart. It was thus addressed :—

Gertrude von Wart to her beloved Sister, Adelaida von Balm.

MY BELOVED SISTER,—

Abbey of Klingenthal.

How shall I write to thee? My head swims, and the dew of death is on my brow; but every harrowing passion is at rest, and, ere I throw off this suffering body, I would bid a fond farewell to thee and my sweet babes. It may be fitting, too, that they, if yet they live in this hard world, should be assured of the innocence of their noble father; although I would, if it were possible, keep them in ignorance of the wrongs and sufferings of their parents. And thou, my sister, my friend, my sweetest companion in happiness, my firmest earthly dependence in darkness and in death, let me for your sake, try to collect my scattered thoughts, my burning memories. Where did we part? Ah! I see you now, rising as a vision before me, yet clearly as when my eyes last rested on your form. Yes, there you linger to watch my departing footsteps, your drooping head bending over our child, your dark tresses falling over your pale cheek on her rosy face, your sweet eyes cast down to hide the tears that gathered on their lids. You were then to me as a ministering angel, as you are now. I left you then to join my husband, as I do now; but oh how different will our meeting be! The faithful Gretlin told you,

on her return, no doubt, that I left her to follow the unfortunate prisoner who was borne through the town as we entered it. Your heart told you, as mine did, who that prisoner was; and you comprehended why I did not return to our hiding-place in the forest. I followed the hooting crowd, who chased that noble form, like bloodhounds, and was nearly trampled beneath the charger's hoofs of her we once called friend and mistress; for Agnes and her brother Leopold followed in the inhuman chase. I know not how I was enabled to perform the journey, feeble and grief-worn as I was, but strength and swiftness were accorded me, and I arrived almost as soon as Agnes had dismounted. I threw myself at her feet, implored—not for pardon, I knew that would be in vain—but for permission to see my wretched husband, to share his prison, even his punishment. "Take away this mad woman," she said, as she spurned me with her foot. I fell powerless to the ground, and a merciful insensibility spared me awhile the consciousness of further insult.

When I recovered my senses, I was in the castle of the haughty Countess of Steinen, Agnes's former preceptress. I believe for some days I deserved the reproach of the cruel Queen; my misery *had* driven me mad. Horrific forms flitted around my bed, and harsh voices grated on my ear. In after-times I recalled the once-beautiful but then fiend-like countenance of the Queen of Hungary amongst my tormentors. I have thought, but I know not if it were delirium or reality, that I suffered personal injury at her hands; for there were bruises and wounds long after on my lacerated limbs. But why should I recall wrongs I have prayed a more justly-offended God to forgive? One evening, just as the setting sun had thrown its last rays into my miserable chamber, I felt as though a light had broken on my mind, and that mental consciousness had returned. But how describe the horror of that awakening! The weight of woe which rushed on my soul could not have been endured had I not known on Whom to roll it. I was reduced to the extremity of weakness, but still memory was strong. The

shades of evening had fallen when I perceived a light in the distant passage leading to the room I occupied. I closed my eyes, but as footsteps approached I discerned a voice whose accents I now trembled to hear.

“Do you say, sir Leech”—these were the words—“that the wretch cannot be conveyed to Winterthur?”

“I do, madam;” and the speaker’s voice was gentle and compassionate; “the damp of death is already on her brow.”

“Hold the lamp nearer. That will do; pah! the reptile scarcely breathes. ‘Tis pity we can’t keep her alive to witness the last writhings of her traitor husband, and to descend in company with him into the purgatory that awaits them.”

“May the Lord have mercy on their souls!” said or whispered the same gentle voice.

“Your prayers and your care may now be dispensed with, sir Leech. My object baffled, Gertruda von Wart must poison God’s fair earth no longer;” and the voice of Agnes sunk as she added, “You will prepare a sleeping potion for her to-night, or I shall find some other way of getting rid of her to-morrow, and rewarding your dutiful services.”

“Heaven will release us both from such a dire necessity, madam: her pulse is scarcely beating;” and as the Leech spoke, he took my cold hand in his. I could not resist the soft pressure of pity, and unconsciously returned it.

After the Queen and her attendant left me, I believe I fell asleep, but the return of the Leech with a light awoke me. He was accompanied by my usual jailer, a coarse country woman, and bidding her raise my head, he held a cup full of liquid to my lips. I drank. What had *I* to fear from the poisoned draught, now the wish of my soul to join my husband was denied? The Leech laid me gently down again, and bade the attendant seek her own couch, as her charge, he assured her, would “sleep soundly, and need no help.” He spoke truly; I did sleep soundly, and awoke wonderfully strengthened and refreshed. The

nurse still slumbered heavily, although the dawn had already streaked the clouds. Her coarse habiliments were thrown on a chair near her bed. Oh, Adelaide, the wild possibility of beholding *him* once more flashed across my mind. I arose, endued with supernatural strength; dressed myself rapidly in the woman's peasant dress; passed the court of the castle without obstruction—and found myself free! I will not—I would not even had I time and strength, pain you with an account of my sufferings. I heeded them not. All I feared was not to arrive in time to soothe the death struggle. I was frail, and could only travel through by-ways for fear of pursuit. I was known and recognized by many; and fed, sheltered, guided, and pitied by all. The popular mind had undergone a complete change; and the Swiss, who had closed their doors on those they deemed the assassins of the Emperor, were horrified and indignant at the foul vengeance wreaked on their innocent relatives and retainers.* At the end of three days, I knew I was approaching the end of my journey. I knew, too, that the trial of my innocent husband was ended, and that his sentence—just Judge of Heaven, do I live to write it!—was to be stretched on the wheel, and tortured until life was quenched in agony.

It was quite evening before I approached the town of Winterthur, near which he was doomed to suffer. The public road lay over an open common; but, for better concealment, I took a path through a wood which skirted a meadow. The weather was calm and hazy, and the watery moon gave but feeble light. I struggled on through the thick underwood until I perceived, from the increased rush of the water, that I approached the meadow that borders the river. I listened. The voice of the torrent fell not alone on my ear; there was another sound—the creaking of a heavy, slowly-turning wheel that broke on the stillness of night. Oh, my sister, my sister! never from that moment has that sound left my ear; for even

* Historical.

now, amid the harpings of angelic welcomes, it will intrude. On that accursed engine hung the noble, the gentle Von Wart: his manly form disjointed; his youthful comeliness marred; his heart torn with a thousand griefs; but firm, resigned, unmurmuring, and amid unspoken anguish feeling for others.

For three mortal days he hung in wringing torture; and there too I remained, without shelter, without food, but I recked of neither. My only solace was, as the wheel in its never-ceasing round approached within my reach, to speak words of never-dying affection to him with whom my soul was more firmly knit in that hour of extremity than even in the warmth of our first espousals. I could breathe of comfort, too, beyond this mortal coil—of comfort my own soul refused in that hour to share; and, ever as the inexorable wheel bore his strained frame beyond my reach, I could run and dip my handkerchief, his own precious gift, in the cool stream, and return to moisten his burning brow. The executioner, man of blood as he was, did not chase me from the wheel, although he perilled his own life by the indulgence. May God hear him in his hour of need!

My beloved spoke but rarely. A few expressions of undying love; a blessed assurance of the forgiveness and support of his God and Saviour, and a few loving messages to you, my sister, and our babes, were all that passed his lips. Once only he spoke of the past, and that was to declare his innocence of all actual participation in the Emperor's murder, and that of his unhappy friends, in any premeditation of the guilty deed. Once before (but that was in the presence of Leopold and his assembled judges, at his trial), he dared boldly to defend his unhappy associates.* "Let not Prince John," he said, "or his faithful followers be judged as regicides. Albert, who imbued his hands in

* The whole of this narrative is historical, but, as it is gathered from many sources, it is not deemed necessary in a work of fiction to enumerate them.

the blood of his lawful Prince, the Emperor Adolphus, who plundered the lands of his infant nephew committed as ward to his care, was far more deserving death and dis honour than they—goaded and stung as they were by insult and injury."

On the fourth morning, a distant murmur, as of an approaching multitude struck on ears painfully attent. The trampling of horses was next distinguished; and soon the strained eye discerned Leopold and his sister at the head of the advancing and tumultuous throng. "Where are the crows,"* shrieked the Archduke, "that the traitor still keeps his eyes?" I felt not the sneer; my faculties were all absorbed in the dying words and throes of my beloved—"faithful unto death" were those last words. Suddenly all expression of agony passed from his wrung brow, and a seraphic smile irradiated his countenance. The power of the tyrant was annihilated, and the spirit sheltered in the bosom of its Redeemer. I saw and heard no more. Some friendly arm bore me unhurt through the crowd. In after-days I sought to recall the voice which entreated me to fly, or they would stretch me on the wheel of my martyred husband, and my impression is, it was that of the benevolent Leech. May every blessing, living and dying, be his! To him I owe the precious privilege of soothing the last hours of my beloved.

I can give you no further account of my escape but that, a week after, I reached the convent of the White Ladies at Basle, from which blessed asylum I now write—a broken-hearted, demented wretch; and was received as a sister by our noble kinswoman the Prioress. Although herself in trouble, she hesitated not to receive the proscribed outlaw, whom she was obliged to conceal from all but one or two of her nuns, who with herself nursed me with the tenderness of affectionate sisters. She told me of your and Gertruda's safety, but spoke not of my babe, and I asked no questions. They told me I seldom spoke, and never

* Historical.

smiled ; but sat, my eyes seemingly following the revoltings of the *fatal wheel*. I knew nothing of the flight of time ; the capacity of suffering was all that was left me. It is only now, as death approaches, that I have felt capable of reflection or reason. Let me, then, in the brief restoration of both, hasten to assure you, my beloved sister, that I leave you and our Gertruda under the care of the good hermit, and the protection of God. They are silent as to the fate of my babe ; but I trust soon to meet him and his father in heaven. Many are the questions I would ask—many are the blessings I would breathe on ye, my best-loved ; but my strength fails me, my eyes grow dim : I am hastening to the land where every doubt is solved, and all sorrow hushed ; yet would I not depart without a fervent prayer for our brother outcasts—for *him* the cause of all our bitter woe—for him, the heaviest sufferer, the sorest wronged, the —farewell ! farewell !

The last lines of Gertruda von Wart's manuscript were written in uncertain characters, rendered still more indistinct by the tears which dimmed the reader's eyes, and the feelings of pity and indignation that swelled her bosom. "Oh, Thou just and gracious God !" she involuntarily exclaimed, with joined hands and upraised eyes, "dost Thou permit the spoiler to live at ease in these halls of splendour, built of blood and rapine ?" Alas, Bertha did not yet know to what extent the worm of remorse preyed on the vitals of the seemingly passionless being for whom she now only felt loathing and indignation ; for the contemplation of her enormities, and the sufferings of her victims had silenced the pleadings by charity, and pity seemed rather to suffocate than to soften. She knelt down, but harassing doubts of the goodness and justice of that Being, whom to love and serve was her vital breath, drove her from His footstool. Where, then, should she fly ? and a soothing thought arose, natural to those for whom the house of God is always open, to seek within it for peace and protection.

When Bertha entered the church, the nuns were still engaged in their midnight service in the choir, and their voices penetrated even to the farther end of the lofty and magnificent building, where the Princess knelt on the steps of the high altar—but those voices had died away in choral chant, and each pale votary had retired to her cell ere Bertha found the peace she sought. When at length she arose to depart, the fall of approaching footsteps caused her to hesitate, and, as in the lofty form of the intruder she recognized that of her aunt, she shrank in trembling behind a pillar. The histories she had but now listened to added yet deeper terror to that usually inspired by this singular woman, which her present appearance did not tend to diminish. The Abbess was clad in the habit of a penitent, consisting of a coarse black mantle, scarcely reaching to the ankles, which, with her feet, were bare. Her head was uncovered save by a long scarf-like veil, which, falling on one side, did not conceal her pale but unusually-agitated features. Her step, so unlike her stately and measured pace, was rapid and unsteady, and she checked it ever and anon to look behind, as if she feared pursuit. At such pauses she uttered incoherent addresses, sometimes in the tone of supplication, and again in that of anger or command.

When this fearful apparition reached the chapel dedicated to St. Klare, situated in a recess behind the high altar, she prostrated herself at the foot of the shrine, and wildly grasping the gilded railings, exclaimed, “Here at least the fiends of hell cannot reach. O holy, beneficent Virgin! thou for whose honour I have stripped the orphan of his heritage, and driven the widow homeless on the hard world, throw thy sheltering arms round me, and save me from the demons that stand ready to bear me off to the fires of purgatory!” For a brief space the labouring soul seemed to have found a respite; but soon her breath quickened, her bosom heaved, and the tears dried on her inflamed eyeballs as they were fixed in a distant and intense gaze. Her mutterings were for some time unintelligible, until, raising her voice, the trembling

listener thought she discerned the name of Von Wart. "Dost thou demand thy daughter?" she inquired. "Leave her yet awhile. I will cherish her as the apple of my eye. High destinies await her—Bride of Heaven, Abbess of Koenigsfelden. Art thou appeased, Baron von Wart? Are thy cruel torments assuaged? Ay, thou bowest thy head: now 'I bathe in May-dew.'" A soft smile now beamed over her majestic features, but the moment of tranquillity soon passed off, and she called again with loud shrieks to St. Klare to shield her from the fast-gathering phantoms of the murdered that seemed, to her disordered imagination and guilt-burdened conscience, to crowd around her, and demand retribution.

"What want ye?" she exclaimed. "Fasts, vigils, pilgrimages, penances? Have I not watched and prayed, have I not knelt and fasted, through years of mortification and anguish? Do I not maintain a host of pilgrims, to bear to distant shrines propitiatory offerings in your behalf, and innumerable priests to offer masses for your souls? What more do ye demand?" She raised her head, and looked slowly around, as if waiting for an answer. "What more, I ask? Blood? *Blood*, say ye?"

And as the wretched woman shrieked out the dreadful word, she seized a spiked scourge which lay on the altar, throwing at the same time the covering from her neck and shoulders. Bertha sunk on her knees, and buried her face in her mantle. A stifled groan followed the first application of the self-inflicted torture. Another and another stroke resounded through the dim aisles, followed by more audible sounds of suffering. Ashamed of her cowardice, the trembling girl rose to make an attempt to reach the unfortunate devotee, and, if possible, prevent her doing herself further injury. But the steps were so tottering, and the light, shed only from one ever-burning lamp, so bewildering that ere she reached the shrine of St. Klare the wretched woman lay stretched, in stone-like insensibility, at its foot. But a ministering angel bent over her, in the benign form of Sister Ethel, who gladly accepted aid from the Princess in the restoration of her patient.

"I pray you," she said softly, "to rub these essences on the benumbed limbs, whilst I lay a healing plaster on these delicate but, alas, lacerated shoulders."

As Sister Ethel applied herself to the task, tears from the deep well of her loving heart fell warm on the wounds she bound up with no unskilful hand.

"I feared this," she said, "when I found she had not returned to her apartment after midnight prayers; but, my precious daughter, why art *thou* here at such an hour? I would thou hadst been spared such a leave-taking of Koenigsfelden."

"It will teach me patience under lighter woes; but it is an awful lesson! My dear Sister Ethel, how do I grieve that thou shouldest be subject to its repetition!"

"It is my vocation," answered the nun mournfully. But raising her beautiful, exceedingly beautiful eyes, beaming with Heaven's own light, she added, "And is it not a blessed vocation to soothe the sufferings of one, awful both in the commission of crime and its atonement? Oh, my Princess! may you never know that direst of all torture—remorse."

She laid her hand as she spoke on her patient's wrist, and quickly added, "I feel the blood again beginning to creep along the veins. Away! away!"

It was well for the terrified and half-fainting girl that she found help and sympathy so near. Her faithful Blandina, alarmed at not finding the Princess in her room, as well as at her unusual vigils, had reached the chapel just in time to support her back to her apartment. Here, after administering some restoratives, she laid her on her bed, and delicately avoiding all questions, soothed the agitated spirits of her charge with gentle caresses, until, entirely exhausted both in mind and body, the weary sufferer fell asleep, still holding the hand of Blandina—

AND WHO IS BLANDINA?

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO INFLUENCES.

There is a sickly odour in this flower,
Sucked from dank graves and yew-tree's pois'nous shade.
Oh, give me one nursed by the dews of Heaven,
Tinged by its sun and fragrant with its breath.

We have compared Agnes of Hapsburg to a beautiful flower planted in a noisome atmosphere. We would further illustrate our metaphor by going back a few years, to relate the early history of her niece, the Princess Bertha, thereby showing the effect of different influences on characters which by nature bore a strong resemblance. It is true, that in her outward form as well as disposition, the niece's resemblance to her aunt was a softened and modified one; yet the character of both was of that lofty stamp almost unknown, because little drawn forth in our time, yet not sparingly developed under the peculiar influences of the middle ages. Both aunt and niece were endowed with eminent personal beauty, strong sense, lively imagination, fervent affections, and exalted piety. Acted on by diverse influences, the similar character of each had been differently displayed. In Agnes, religion had degenerated into superstition and asceticism; in Bertha it was exhibited in the virtues of active life. Thus, too, if filial piety, the predominant characteristic of each, had, inflamed by bigotry, led Agnes into the most criminal excesses, it was daily displayed, under the influence of a purer light, in the implicit obedience and generous self-sacrifice of her kinswoman.

The Archduke Frederick, Bertha's father, for the first and probably the only time of his life, ventured to thwart the will of his imperious sire, by preferring the object of his early affection, a lady of noble though not royal lineage, to the

alliances proposed to him by parental ambition. In the first heat of his displeasure, Albert banished his son to a remote fortress on the borders of Bohemia, with which country he was then at war.

To this distant and unsuitable station his bride accompanied him; affection converted it into an Eden, and here the young couple passed a year in the enjoyment of a cloudless union, although in the midst of the dangers and discomforts of a besieged town. Here our sweet Bertha entered life under circumstances of unusual peril. The plague, that avenger of war, broke out in the garrison, penetrated into the royal apartments, and approached the cradle of the infant. Three nurses were carried off in succession, until the terror became so great that no one offered to approach the mysterious child, who, unharmed herself, seemed fatal to all who ministered to her. Deprived of her natural food, the infant refused all other, and must have perished had there not at this moment an armistice been proclaimed, to bury the numerous victims which, in either army, had fallen a prey to the dire disease; and an opportunity being thus afforded of making diligent search amongst the neighbouring peasantry for a nurse for the famishing babe.

"Take her away," said the despairing mother, who was herself reduced to extreme weakness; "I cannot see my child die."

As the attendant bore the child from the apartment, she was met at the door by the Duke, followed by a young woman dressed in the Bohemian costume.

"The Lord hath sent us timely succour," said he, addressing the drooping mother. "This good angel has just presented herself at the gate, and offers to nurse our child."

The Princess sprang towards the providential succourer, and took her hand. "You do not, then, fear for your own babe?"

"She is safe in her Saviour's fold."

"And you will leave your family?"

"I am a lone woman, madam. My husband fell in battle a few months since, my child died yesterday, and I have nothing

to attach me to life but the hope of saving that of the young Princess."

The child attached itself eagerly to its devoted nurse, and throve daily under her care; but as its shrivelled limbs regained their roundness, the frame of its lovely mother became more and more attenuated. Faithfully did Blandina, for such was the nurse's name, perform her duty to the mother as well as the child; and so affectionately and skilfully did she minister to her that, throughout her long illness and gradual decay, the Princess would scarcely allow any other attendant to approach her sick bed. This preference naturally drew envy and ill-will on the Bohemian, if such indeed she were. But there were strange stories afloat of her having come from some country beyond the Alps inhabited by a tribe of sorcerers; and the infatuated love, thus it was deemed, both of mother and infant was traced to unlawful arts.

She, Blandina, was also detected by prying eyes poring over some strange leaves which she carried in her bosom; and it was further affirmed that she breathed incantations from them over the sick couch of the invalid. Certain it was that the lullaby she sang by the infant's cradle was in language and sound of strange and marvellous sweetness. These foreign words, too, were lisped by the babe whose gentle mother, acquainted probably of their meaning, would listen till tears filled her eyes. The priest always turned disdainfully aside as the silent woman passed him, for, as was generally believed, she had refused his summons to the confessional. Under other circumstances, it is probable Frederick would have noticed these rumours, which had not failed to meet his ear; but, in a distant land, deprived of her accustomed comforts, how could he, even on the supposition that he wished it, deprive his dying wife of services so essential, and to whom else could he confide the care of his infant daughter? But yet more solemn ties bound him eventually to Blandina. His almost idolized wife in her dying moments exacted a promise that their child should never, but at her own request, be separated from her tender nurse, to whom

she confessed she had yet deeper obligations than that of her darling's life.

The cause of the paternal estrangement being now removed, the Emperor summoned his son again to his court; and, Frederick's affections being for ever buried in the grave of his first and only love, allowed his father to choose for him a second wife, as ambition or state policy directed. But, yielding in all that did not compromise principle or his deeper affections, he sternly refused to listen to any overtures from dames of higher birth to supply Blandina's place near his daughter, or to interfere with the promise given to her mother never to separate her from their child.

Although poor Blandina's path was beset with thorns, she had wonderful prudence, and she picked her way through them without any severe wounds. Of pleasing and somewhat imposing exterior, courteous but reserved, she made no intimacies; but if her aid was needed she gave it readily, being skilled in woman's mission—the care of the sick, household management, and the nurture of children. But, her information imparted, her ministration rendered, she returned to the absorbing object of her affections and interests. Both at the Castle and the Abbey she remained in her Princess's apartments, attending on her alone, all the necessary communications with the outer world being carried on by Inna, the younger tire-woman. Nor was Bertha less content than her nurse with this companionship; for in those days it was rare to find in any station a woman of so many attainments as Blandina possessed, enhanced as they were by good sense and devoted attachment; so that, from the moment she received her infant life from her gentle nurse to that in which she had found her anxiously waiting at the door of the church, as already mentioned, they had never passed an entire day asunder. It will be believed that the approaching return of the Archduke was the constant subject of anticipation to both, as well as their consequent emancipation from the convent, now invested with additional horrors; but ere that happy moment arrived Bertha was to endure a heavy

loss. Her beloved preceptress, who was endeared yet more since she had become acquainted with her sorrows and her wrongs—the noble Adelaide von Balm—the now Prioress of the convent, and aunt of Gertruda—declined daily, and, it was evident to all, could not long remain amongst them. Bertha, therefore, felt an additional anxiety to obtain her consent to Gertruda's leaving the convent; not merely, as had been arranged, for a temporary visit, but to become the inmate of her own future home. Since the mournful history of her parents' misfortunes, and the dreadful scene she had herself witnessed, Bertha was more than ever desirous to remove Gertruda from Koenigsfelden, and as she trusted that a little intercourse with the outer world, and the ennobling influences of liberty would divert her present predilection for the veil, she felt anxious to secure the sanction of her aunt for removing her from it. At first the Prioress listened to the proposition with cheerful hope, but this soon faded.

“No, dearest Princess, your bright dream can never be realized. You know the tie which binds my niece to Koenigsfelden, and, even were this dissolved, the veil is the vocation of her choice.”

“Choice? Dear mother, what choice has Gertruda ever had? Promise me, at least, that you will not oppose my wishes.”

“I will promise yet more: I here solemnly delegate to you all the power I possess over my beloved child: I will discuss the subject with her; but let it not again be named between us.”

It never was. From that time the dying saint's thoughts were detached from time and fixed on eternity. Occupying as she did the office next the Abbess, and yet more intimately connected with her sister recluses, she wished to dedicate her few remaining days to their benefit, and the more intimate concerns of her own soul. All her strength, therefore, was reserved for acts of devotion and farewell counsels to her community. Nevertheless, each afternoon, when the weather

permitted, she took her accustomed walk in the garden, though its extent gradually diminished, until, unable to descend the terrace-steps, Father Swithin and Henga constructed a wicker couch, in which they carried her to her favourite spot near the fountain. Here, bidding her bearers continue their gardening occupations, and her pupils, the Princess and Gertruda, wander at will, she remained in quiet communion with Blandina, until the setting sun reassembled them around her couch, all alike anxious to minister to the cherished invalid. One evening—it was the last—possibly she knew it to be such—the Prioress desired the whole of her faithful little band to remain near her. She spoke not of her departure, nor did she bid them farewell. Her discourse was of the goodness of God, as shown in the beautiful world around. She spoke of the glories of the heavens,—of the beauty and fragrance of the flowers, the sweet song of the birds, and, above all, the more fragrant, more beautiful, more enduring love and fidelity of friends, however differing in age or station. She did not name any, but there was not one present who did not understand the meaning of her eye, as it rested on Father Swithin and Henga awhile, and was then turned towards Blandina; or could mistake the significance of the action when joining the hands of the Princess and Gertruda, as she took one of each, and clasped them together in her own.

On that same evening Blandina laid the dying Prioress in her bed, from which she never arose, though she yet lingered a few days. The Abbess was unusually moved at the prospect of losing one whose holy life had shed a sanctity throughout her rule. In the hope that his healing skill and the far-famed waters of St. Hilda might be of avail, she overlooked her displeasure at the good Hermit's rejection of her proffered favours, and summoned him to the dying bed. The crystal draught he brought was, no doubt, grateful to the fevered lip; but, oh, how much more grateful were the ministrations of the holy man to the soul of the departing! To his watchful care she submitted the surviving objects of her love, and to

his hand she entrusted a parting token for one for whom she had never ceased to weep and pray, conjuring him to endeavour to find out the retreat of the wretched John of Suabia, and soothe his lacerated spirit by the consolations of religion and the balm of Christian sympathy. These last duties fulfilled, whilst the Hermit knelt at the side of her pallet breathing accents of peace and love, and the Princess and Gertruda stood, as they believed, watching her tranquil slumbers, the gentle spirit of Adekaise von Balm passed from its suffering tenement.

Three weeks had elapsed since the death of their revered friend, and the grief of the Princess and Gertruda had sobered into sadness, when the happy news arrived of the return of the captive ex-emperor (whom we shall in future designate the Archduke Frederick) to his paternal castle. It was accompanied by a summons for his daughter and her friend, the novice Gertruda, to repair thither the day after the morrow; and the Abbess, desirous they should carry with them an impression of the felicities of a convent life as an antidote to the allurements of the world, anticipated by a few days the jubilee of a nun, which festival had been looked for as an event as important as it was rare. We shall not attempt to describe the sensation occasioned by this hasty development, or the preparations for the coming performance, but will take advantage of the universal bustle to introduce a personage destined to fill an important part in this section of what may be termed the "era of individuals," in which—girdled about by obsequious vassals and supporters—the Prince, the Prelate, the Knight, and the Nun usually "strutted their little hour" on the stage of life, in the unity and simplicity of the ancient drama; unelbowed by the crowd of performers that, in the melodrama of the nineteenth century, diverts attention from the principal actors.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ABBOT.

Alack ! alack ! all his warm gush of life
Turned from its course to batten noisome weeds.

THE apartment, commonly named "the abbot's parlour," whose heavy oak-paneled door we are about to enter, answering in size and form to that already described as occupied by the Abbess, was fitted up in a manner equally characteristic of the presiding spirit. The high-backed chair, or rather, abbatial throne, with its carved mitre and gilded pinnacles, stood before a table lumbered with rude mathematical instruments, and was placed within reachable distance of shelves recessed in the thick wall, of sufficient depth not only to contain a vast number of manuscripts, with their clumsy binding and ponderous clasps, but as well to allow the student to peruse them on the spot to which they were chained. Cabinets of minerals, cases of rainbow-tinted insects, stuffed birds, and fossil remains, indicated—both in their arrangement and preservation—considerable science coupled with taste. Nor were valuable specimens of the fine arts less prominent in the decorations of the friar's cell. A rare painting of the Virgin surmounted a small but well-designed altar, while the elaborate finish of an ivory pietas that stood on it was rivalled by some carvings in wood, executed by one of the brothers of the monastery. There were also traces of the sister-art of music. Before a high desk stood a youth habited as a chorister, engaged in arranging choral music under those curious characters used in the infancy of notation, whose slight form and classic features were forcibly contrasted by a heavy middle-aged German friar occupying the raised recess of the mullioned casement, who went on diligently transcribing from a moth-eaten parchment. He wrote with such imperturbable

composure, as if each stroke of his pen were regulated by the pendulum of an antique clock which stood near him. At the present moment, having reached the bottom of his page, he remained with suspended pen; whilst his employer, who had left his seat with that object, leant over the brawny shoulder of the transcriber to scan its accuracy.

We cannot permit the patient workman to turn over the finished leaf until we have sketched a hasty portrait of the extraordinary man whose eye rested on it—that eye, whose “calm gaze,” whilst it betrayed nothing, seemed to penetrate all things. Yet, with this exception, there was little distinguishing in the outer form of the superior of the Minorites. He was of that medium height, size, and age which least invites observation, and of the cast of feature which hovers between homely and handsome. But the intellectual stature of Father Francesco was far above par, and his acquirements were various, and of the first order: an elegant classic, a subtle casuist, a historian in advance of his age, a diplomatist worthy of Machiavelli. Moreover—for to this he owed his early advancement—he was a musician of consummate taste and skill. The prominent feature in his early history was, that when a simple chorister in the Sistine Chapel, his melodious voice attracted the notice of Gregory the Eighth, and this acute Pontiff, speedily discovering that his *protégé* possessed yet more available talents than came within the scale of harmony, spared no cost in their cultivation. The favour of the patron kept pace with the rapid attainments of the scholar. After having filled various posts and executed sundry missions, in the conduct of which his diplomatic adroitness was tested by its attendant success—the chorister of the Pope’s band finally saw himself advanced to the high office of Confessor to the House of Hapsburg, Abbot of Koenigsfelden, and Superior of the Order of St. Francis, or, as they termed themselves, with we fear a somewhat questionable humility, the Minorite Friars. This rapid advancement excited little surprise in an age when learning had begun to assume a prominent influence, and in a country in which superiority of attainment and subtilty of

intellect were rewarded by the same deferential admiration as in colder and more warlike climes was conceded to the possessors of courage, generosity, and the other brilliant, but often-times pernicious, qualities of the conqueror. But the personal claims of our young aspirant were as powerful in retaining as in procuring advancement. A shrewd observer of his patron's humour, he soon became an able minister to his wishes. In manners frank, of a disposition yielding in trifles, yet inflexible in essentials, he gained the confidence, fostered the hopes, promoted the aims, and obeyed the commands of those whom he ultimately moulded to his will. But on whom did Ambition ever bestow her glittering favours without exacting a more than commensurate sacrifice? The Church of Rome is especially rigid in her claims. She tolerates no rival in the services and affection of her votaries. The chain which binds them together must be formed of the dissevered links of every other relation. It was thus, as he climbed her ladder, that Francesco Montolivo found himself obliged to loosen, one by one, the dearest ties; and if that one dearest of all—his love for his early betrothed, the now Sister Ethelinda of Koenigsfelden—was snapped, as we have seen, by her own heroic hand, could she, would she have severed it had she not felt that the heart once a captive to ambition grows cold to all other claims? Renouncing all family ties, the soul of Montolivo concentrated its zealous energy in what he tried to believe the interests of the Church, and the advancement of his Order; but if, as has been often affirmed, one great source of her influence lies in the hope with which she animates her meanest acolyte, of rising to her highest dignities, it will be believed that the ambition of so gifted a son would aspire to reach their culminating point. The next step in the ascent was, as he hoped, already within his reach, on the fulfilment of certain conditions.

It is well known that the rival Orders of Sts. Francis and Dominic divided the Romish Church for more than a century; but, however fiercely the contention raged between the Orders, a still more deadly hatred was entertained by the Franciscans

towards those of their own body whose simplicity, devotion, and self-denial merited the appellation, though bestowed on them in scorn, of "spiritual." But the endeavour of these pious reformers to restore the primitive austerity of their rule, though naturally provoking the opposition of their luxurious brethren, would not have raised the jealousy of the Vatican had it not been accompanied by a struggle for spiritual reform, and a groping after that Light which, however obscured by the rubbish of ignorance and superstition, was never quite extinguished. Celestine the Fifth, the spiritual supporter of these "Spiritual Franciscans," after a brief reign, abdicated the Papal rule which he had reluctantly assumed. His successor, Gregory the Eighth, mistrustful lest he might again attract followers, treacherously detained him in prison. We will not now inquire into the share our Abbot took in this transaction, nor will we here detail the zeal with which he combated the heresy of his brethren without; those within the walls loved and venerated him, seldom crossing a rule that was as mildly enforced as it was steadily upheld; the rule, too, of one who it was well known could be formidable in punishment, as he was munificent in reward—of one who, without assuming to be an ascetic in abstinence, or a saint in discipline, was scrupulously exact in the performance of a burdensome ritual, and the rigid enforcement of conventional discipline.

A tap at the door recalls us to the monastery of Koenigsfelden. Ere the applicant for admittance entered, the mechanical penman had begun a new parchment, and the Superior had resumed his chair of state, from whence, either personally or by proxy, he daily regulated the affairs of the community.

"Thou art precisely he of whom I had occasion," said the Abbot, as the portly Major-domo—in monastic phrase, Cellarer—entered. "Draw near I prithee, and tell me why the festival of the Holy Cross was so ill graced. Our brothers complain that the venison was scarce, and that the tale of oaten cakes ran short."

"Thy rebuke should of right, reverend father, descend on the caitiffs' heads who refused Brother Hidalgo's customary demands; pleading, forsooth, the double dole sent to the Castle, to aid the celebration of the Archduke's return."

"In that they did well," returned the Superior. "It were meet our table should hold fast all the year, rather than aught should be lacking in welcome to our noble Prince. But, these things duly observed, I will, good brother, that ye kill the fatted calf, broach the best wine, and let the abundance of to-night atone for the abstinence of yester-eve. Meanwhile, dispatch hither Hidalgo: we must see to it that the Church also be not defrauded of her right."

Hildago obeyed the summons, and received orders to abate nothing of the Abbey's customary dues. Numerous applicants succeeded, and were in their turn attended to with the same concise courtesy, that, while it encouraged approach, forbade familiarity; after which, fondly hoping all present demands satisfied, the student, yielding himself up to the fascination of Aristotle, had just plunged deep into the magic maze, when he was once more recalled to vulgar life by another, though gentler, tap at the door.

"*Pazienza!*" breathed the baffled student, but it was in the sweet accents of his native south; while the wrinkle that had slightly contracted his brow at this fresh interruption gave place to a smile of welcome as Father Swithin entered.

"Thy basket, good brother, is an overflowing cornucopia," said the gracious Superior, as the gardener, with mingled pride and reverence, laid his offering of fruit and flowers before him.

"Ay, reverend father, concord and plenty were, with deference be it spoken, twin sisters in those golden times when Apollyon and his musical nine held their meetings on the top of Mount Pegasus."

"Thou hast not forgotten thy early studies, good Swithin, in exchanging them, *Dei gratia*, for more profitable employment. Verily, Vertumnus himself never produced finer fruits at the banquets of your old acquaintances on Mount Olympus.

But how thrive the mandrakes? have thy goslings escaped their vegetable shell?"

"Indeed, reverend father," replied the old man, his eyes sparkling as he espied the well-known manuscript on its accustomed shelf, "if your most sanctimonious holiness would but allow me another glimpse of yon herbal, I shall hardly fail of accomplishing the hatching. The seed hath freely germinated, the plant shot forth; the flower-bud hath formed, and—"

"Thou shalt have free access to thy oracle," said the Superior, turning at the same time to the young chorister, and bidding him take his task to the Chapel-master. "But, good brother, there is another charge I would inquire of thee anent. Our lady Abbess would have thy pupil Henga resume his studies under Father Anselmo. What opinest thou?"

"That it were but labour lost, most reverential. St. Mercury himself could not teach the lad his letters; yet in aught beside lacketh he neither wit nor will. For all matters relating to spade or hoe, sowing, reaping, grafting, pruning, tying, drying—"

"He doth great credit to thy instructions, and thou shalt have my best efforts with the Abbess to keep him at thy side."

"A happy compact for both master and man; for well may we be compared to those warriors of old, Pyramus and Thisbe, who were never seen apart—whose history your reverence wots of—for as soon as Aurora, god of day, appeareth in the heavens, until chaste Dian draws her bow across the clouds, the boy and I are never sundered, and when—"

"*Labitur et labetur in omne volubilis,*" murmured the Abbot; but, encouraged by the benign look which accompanied the quotation—for smiles are easier construed than Latin—Father Swithin proceeded further to laud his pupil by relating the order he had received from the Princess to bring her a nosegay every morning when she repairs to the Castle. "I

shall thus, at the return of the Ganymede learn daily of her highness's welfare: though, perhaps, as thou hast a more courtly demeanour than he, it were better the lad should gather, and thou present the flowers."

The pleased gardener promised obedience, and, with reverential bows and retreating slides, backed out of the presence. After his departure, the Abbot sat some time in deep reverie: and wherefore? Surely the babble of the simple old gardener could scarcely furnish food for cogitation for the astute Franciscan; yet thus it was. The Abbot belonged to a community who long before the birth of our Christian Philanthropist had discovered the "mighty ness of Littles." *Littles* are, in truth, the moving power of the Church of Rome, and therefore it is that, her teachers early discovering that the mind like the eye gets contracted when constantly applied to the contemplation of minute objects, it was their policy to add lens on lens for the magnifying of a butterfly's wing, whilst they kept the telescope of truth from the eye of their followers, and rarely applied it to their own. But the meditations of the philosophic prelate were interrupted by a visitor to whom Aristotle himself in bodily presence must have given way. The Archduke Leopold. Having sprung from his reeking steed, pushed aside the obsequious porter, and strode hurriedly through the cloisters, whose arched roof echoed to the ring of his iron-shod boots, he entered the apartment of the Abbot, and abruptly, though cordially, saluted him.

"Your highness comes to announce the happy return of your royal brother?" asked the friar.

"Rather call it the flight of a manacled slave from his owner!" was the bitter reply.

The wary listener allowed the fiery spirit to chafe and foam, its exhalation betraying the information he did not deem it prudent to demand.

"Poor Frederick," continued the speaker, "has not yet told us what his jailer's demands are. He craved a day's repose; and who could deny it? Ah, father, you will find the strong

man bent." Leopold's voice faltered as he uttered the last few words, but soon regained its ringing tones as he added, "To-morrow we shall learn Louis of Bavaria's proposals; but, if my brothers be of my mind, they shall be answered by a call to arms, which will be speedily echoed by his Holiness and our Swiss allies."

These hopes and determinations were riveted by this interview with one who well knew that the Pontiff, although actuated by different motives, was equally interested with the House of Hapsburg in the main object of annihilating the power of the Emperor. Nor was this the only point on which the soldier and the priest agreed: they were further united in a determined opposition to the marriage of the Princess Bertha to her early-affianced husband, Prince John of Luxemburg, now titular King of Bohemia. Leopold's enmity sprang from the injurious treatment his brother Henry *was said* to have received from that prince whilst his prisoner. The prelate's mistrust arose from a deeper cause —the uncompromising temper of that warlike prince, the jealousy he had always exhibited to priestly rule, and, more than all, the favour he had shown the Spiritual Franciscans and other so termed heretics. None, either, knew better than the Abbot of Koenigsfelden, who had watched her almost from childhood, the danger of trusting the investigating mind of the Princess Bertha to such influence; more especially as already over the wild heaths of Bohemia had shot a glimmering of that bright light which, in a succeeding age, flashed from the pyre of the martyred Huss. To these private reasons for enmity towards one personally unknown to either was added a joint motive for action. The favour of the Vatican—with whom the bold and victorious, though yet uncrowned, King of Bohemia was at defiant war—was of vital importance to the ambitious hopes of both the Archduke and the Abbot; and to secure the cardinal's hat, which all but touched the head of the latter, and the supplies which would aid the former to set the Emperor's claim on the liberty of his brother at defiance, they had severally engaged

to use their utmost efforts to snatch the hand of the Princess Bertha from her affianced bridegroom, and place it in that of the heir to the kingdom of Naples. Whilst the Abbot pondered on the best way of introducing a subject which he was well aware occupied his companion's mind equally with his own, Leopold exclaimed,—

“By my faith, in the importance of another subject I had well-nigh forgotten to tell you that a messenger arrived at the Castle just as I left it, from John of Luxemburg, whom, it appears, Frederick had invited to greet his arrival. You start, reverend father, but fear not; the purport of his despatch was to announce that urgent busines called him off to his wild Bohemians for awhile. I am assuming that you know he is at present with the falsely-called Emperor on the other side of the Alps. Methinks a lover's foot should have spurned their highest crag to secure even a passing smile from one worthy a troop of such chivalry. But our tardy suitor, forsooth, saucily confident of his victory, waits the waning of another moon.”

The Abbot faintly smiled. “Hast thou yet to learn, my son, that men do not always act as they say?” Then, fixing his mysterious eyes on his companion, he added with strange emphasis, “It has come to my knowledge that this same moon, now traversing the heavens in her full beauty, shall light with undiminished rays a dark-browed knight and his small band of followers along the lonely passes of St. Gothard.” The speaker hesitated a moment, but withdrew not his eye, then added: “Thou and thy trusty mountaineers—will it not be well that ye go forth to meet the travellers, and escort them to your castle?”

Leopold sprang to his feet. The crimson blood rushed even to his forehead, swelling the veins almost to bursting, whilst it imparted a yet fiercer glow to his eyes. “Is Leopold of Austria degraded to the base leader of a bandit band?” he exclaimed; but, checking his angry mood with strong effort, added, “Gramercy! father, peradventure I mistook thy meaning.”

"Thou didst, my son," said the Abbot calmly; "and yet I merit thy rebuke, since, in deep pity for thy brother's chains, and unadvised desire to efface the stain thrown on a noble race, I had well-nigh forgotten that my priestly office was to counsel pardon, not to provoke reprisal—to bid thee let the spoiler come unscathed, and bear away the jewel of thy house. Calm thee, my son," he continued, still retaining his basilisk gaze on his victim, and checking his reply, "the wrongs of our most sacred Church will stir up holier avengers. I do remember me that thou art a man of blood, and that it was not *her* interests that drove thy revengeful blade, even to its crimson hilt, into the heart of guiltless victims—not the desire to avenge *her* wrongs that stretched the rack for the husband of —"

"O father, father!" exclaimed Leopold, in that voice of embittered feeling which a sense of betrayed trust wrings from the inmost soul, "who was it placed that sword in my hand, adjuring me to use it against the murderers of the Lord's anointed?"

"Ay, but not to tarnish it with the blood of the innocent, that ye might enrich yourselves with their spoil."

"Enrich *ourselves*!" retorted Leopold with sarcastic emphasis on the last word. "Let these lofty walls, these loaded shrines, testify—"

"Thus far," interrupted the priest, "the expiation was generous, but it is not yet complete. There yet remains a long arrear. The exemplary prayers and penances of the dedicated Agnes, the energetic efforts of her warlike brethren, can alone avail to disperse the dark cloud now hanging over their house with threatening portent."

The mantling blood receded from the cheek of Leopold, his late fiery glance was dimmed, the nervous arm hung flaccid at his side, and in a moment the arrogant prince assumed the attitude of a humble penitent, and knelt at the feet of a fellow mortal—such is the power of even a mistaken faith—to claim the relief of pouring out his burdened soul, and obtaining pardon for sins which God only can forgive. This solace was

for the present denied, and the unhappy prince departed unshriveed.

The priest, in the dignity of his office, could accompany his visitor no further than the door of his apartment; but when that closed on him the feelings of the man returned, the amiable feelings of a naturally humane heart. For a short time he remained with eyes fixed on vacancy, the muscles of his face working with uncontrollable emotion; but, whatever might have occasioned that emotion, it was transient. In a few moment she arose, calm and self-possessed, and approaching the table, quickly collected the scattered parchments, and methodically restored the several instruments, mathematical and musical, to their cases. "Adieu for awhile, dear companions of my harmless hours," he murmured; "happy, perchance, had it been for Francesco Montolivo if he had never exchanged ye for the jar of human converse." He then drew aside a curtain from the portrait of the Madonna which hung over the altar, and prostrated himself before it. His countenance brightened, his lips moved with increased rapidity, and he appeared evidently to derive strength and animation from the holy exercise. At first sounds for the most part incoherent broke from his lips, but the closing sentence was delivered with strong and clear emphasis.

"Look not thus coldly, empress of my soul! day-star of my spiritual life! Do I not swear to thee, Mary, ever immaculate, that thine adversary shall lick the dust at thy feet; that, sooner than a daughter of the House of Austria shall share his throne—"

A slight movement in a distant part of the chamber interrupted the unfinished vow. The votary arose, and casting a hasty glance around, recognized the friar in his accustomed niche, immovable as its sculptured mullions. In an instant his late interview with the Archduke Leopold recurred to the Abbot's mind. A moment of alarm was followed by the quieting recollection of the friar's physical deafness, and his no less moral blindness to all beyond the scope of his allotted task. Nevertheless, his employer, while scanning the copied

page, turned a scrutinizing eye on the countenance of his agent, which maintained its imperturbable repose, until the instinctive feeling of weariness or hunger induced him to raise it towards the dial, at the same time as the convent-bell announced the hour of refection. It seemed, in truth, a welcome break both to the master and his workman, and they gladly retired together to partake of the bodily refreshment which the dull and vivacious equally stand in need of.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE JUBILEE.

Oh, hurtful sophistry, to deem that He
Who leads us to the birds and flowers to learn
Sweet liberty, should ever consecrate
A bondage such as this!

THE rising sun had scarcely gilded the spires of Koenigsfelden, ere Father Swithin and his inseparable Henga, embowered in evergreens and laden with baskets full of fruit and flowers, knocked gently at the Porteress's side door.

“Always rare and ready, Father Swithin, bless the Pope !” was her benedictory salutation.

“The morning hour hath gold in its mouth, as the old saying has it, good sister. If Aurora and I had not run a race who should get up first, I had not so early brought all this provender and decoration for your festival.”

“Ay, we are like to have a merry day of it, between Sister Teresa's festival and our young Princess's leave-taking, his Holiness be praised !”

“Nay, good sister, I pray you keep your thanks for a better boon ; for I opine, nay certes, there are many amongst the nuns who will enact the tearful Niobe at her highness's departure.”

“Niobe !” repeated the nun ; “I know naught of such an outlandish cognomen : maybe she was cousin-german to King Nebuchadnezzar. But come into the recreation parlour, and I will unthatch ye there.”

The classic was not quite sure of his exemplar's genealogy, and therefore let the challenge pass, busying himself in unpacking his horticultural treasures.

“What tempting fruit, thanks be to the Pope !” exclaimed Sister Eva, lifting up both hands and eyes in ecstasy as the grower displayed some apples of great size and beauty.

"Nay, here, good sister!" he remarked with some emphasis—for he had Niobe's fame as well as his own to sustain—"craving thy pardon, I must observe that thou dost rob Paul to pay Peter; or I more veraciously say that thou dost wrong me and a more renowned gardener, yclept St. Pomonus, to pay thy compliments to the Pope, as thou seemest to deem it thy duty on all occasions, just or unjust, seemly or unseemly, to do. Now, be it known to thee that the far-famed horticulturist—or, as thou wilt better comprehend, gardener—of whom I spoke, St. Pomonus, was especially noted for the cultivation of this useful fruit, some even opining that it owes its name—*pomus* or *pomme*, by which it is known in some countries—to him; amongst which number I could range many a learned herballist. But to leave these learned matters, which thou as a woman canst not understand—"

"Nay, good father," retorted the nun quickly, "it is as such that I should be best acquainted with the history of the apple." Then turning to Henga, she asked, "Dost thou know whom I am named after, boy?"

"One who longed for forbidden fruit," was the unlooked-for reply; and, although Father Swithin was totally ignorant of its occult meaning, and its appeal to Sister Eva's conscience, he was delighted at Henga's unusual quickness, and her evident embarrassment.

Without asserting the lad's claim to oracular gifts, he had certainly, by chance or design, touched a secret spring which the nun had believed concealed from all but herself and one confidante; and the fear she half entertained of his supernatural intelligence caused her uneasiness, though without inducing any change in her guilty designs. Recovering an embarrassment to which she was little prone, she entered into the festal arrangements, and with a ceremonious apology for leaving the workmen ere their task was completed, hastened away to conclude a certain nefarious bargain with the younger tire-woman of the Princess Bertha, ere she and Blandina had completed their customary morning devotions in the chapel.

The maiden received her tempter with many professions of amity, and hastened to unfold before her admiring gaze a tunic and petticoat of rich Genoa velvet embroidered in gold and many-coloured silks, which had evidently been the object of a previous negotiation, since she added,—

“See, I have kept my part of the agreement, and provided for your festival; you will not, therefore, cheat me of my little holiday; I will not absent myself long; two little hours are all I crave. Remember, you ask my company in your room of Dame Blandina.”

“Thou art a sly wheedler,” said the nun, her eyes fixed on the glittering bait, and her remaining virtue ebbing away in its contemplation. “Well, since thou assurest me the youngster is thy brother, and that the dame will not miss her lady’s tunic before thou canst restore it, I will.”

“I do, I do, dear sister; but hide it quickly in your ample sleeves, for here she comes;” and Inna had hardly time to give the alarm, or Eva to conceal her booty, ere Blandina entered. The sister had been too long schooled in such little passages of cloister life to betray any embarrassment, and she entered at once on her concerted part. Affecting to take it for granted, as she politely phrased it, that the services of her highness’s superior attendant were too valuable to be dispensed with on the eve of quitting Koenigsfelden, she with many smiles and prefaces with which the Pope’s name was ingeniously interlarded, preferred her request for Inna to partake of the refection and recreation of the Jubilee in her parlour, with two or three of the lay sisters bidden expressly to pass a few hours with her by Father Anselmo’s permission.

Poor Blandina, easily deceived, gave a ready acquiescence; but Eva’s conscience was a little more troublesome. She had a way, however, of coaxing and flattering even this importunate monitor. “Father Anselm,” she argued, “always tells us ‘the object sanctifies the means.’ The Princess, doubtless, has many tunics, whilst St. Klare’s only petticoat is faded and torn.” And when conscience next blamed the imprudence of allowing the thoughtless girl’s solitary walk with her

gallant, Expediency tried to silence him, by urging it as the only means by which a petticoat for St. Klare, who sorely needed one, could be procured : that it should be worn only on the day of the saint's approaching fête, and returned to the wardrobe of the Princess, enriched by the odour of sanctity ; even though it might, perchance, be a little tumbled and soiled by the lips of the worshippers. And here, in justice to the princely magnificence of the royal Abbey, it will be right to explain that the St. Klare whose toilette Eva was thus anxiously providing for was not the image whose costly shrine occupied a conspicuous position in the church, but a pet of her own, a much-mutilated wooden doll, the especial idol of her pensioners, which stood in one corner of her parlour, crowned with a glory of tinselled filigree, and staring out of a dusty bower of shell-work and faded flowers. Sister Eva had been lately greatly stirred to a demonstration of zeal in the Church's cause by the apotheosis of a nun at a neighbouring and rival convent for some reported miracle ; and the remark of her own Abbess, "That her sister Hildegarde was more blessed than herself, inasmuch that she, as yet, had not been honoured with any demonstration of miraculous gifts in her community." Now, this had kindled the fire of ambition in Eva's bosom, and, although her plans were not yet matured, she saw a glimmering of canonization in the clouds, and, with a mixture of zeal and self-deception, looked to her idol as the stepping-stone to her elevation. As a necessary preliminary, she set to work to effect its renovation, (for it was in a truly deplorable condition,) and applied to the universal genius and equally diffusive good humour of Father Swithin to help in the pious labour. In the first place, poor Klare had but one foot, and Henga having been entrusted with the job of supplying the missing one, had added a cloven one, and would have proceeded to furnish her with a long tail, had not his patron interfered to prevent it. This mistake was happily amended by the very dextrous manner in which the lad mended the bridge of St. Klare's nose, and added new fingers to her right hand, which, although longer and more slender than those of the

left, were pronounced a great improvement on them. Father Swithin took the painting and varnishing entirely on himself: and here roses, lilies, coral, jet, were “vile words” and faint comparisons for the dazzling hues and gloss of St. Klare’s beauties. Sister Eva’s own hands furnished a new crown and rays, polished the shells, and wove fresh garlands of “flowers of every hue, and without thorn the rose,” for the bower of the saint: we have seen with what ingenuity she also supplied her with suitable apparel.

We must now return from our digression, to the Princess’s apartment, to find her two tire-women occupied in preparations for her departure.

“I wish her highness had absolved thee of thy prayers this morning, Dame Blandina, seeing we have so much on our hands,” observed the younger tire-woman.

“Maybe, her highness does not deem herself privileged to forgive others a duty she so diligently practises herself,” answered Blandina, tucking up her sleeves, and placing herself on her knees before a deep oaken chest.

“Well, then, I would our solemn lady Abbess had vouchsafed thee a substitute in some of those bare-legged friars who are mumbling prayers for the Emperor’s soul, and thou couldst have been spared in such a busy time. I will aver thus much of our Abbess, that she spares no expense for her friends’ salvation.

“Inna,” said Blandina seriously, “were it not better that thou shouldst attend to thy own duties than comment on those of thy betters? The best way of accomplishing extra work is by extra diligence, and not the help of others. Reach me here thy lady’s tunic of Genoa velvet, with the train and garniture thereunto appertaining.”

“I placed it at the bottom of the other chest, dispatched yestre’en to the Castle,” replied Inna, turning aside to conceal a deep blush, which proved her inexperience in the art of deception.

“In that thou hast done it no good turn, wench, since thou knowest it will ill bear to be pressed or crumpled.”

"Does the Fraulein Gertruda accompany our Princess to the Castle?" interrupted the culprit, eager to change the subject.

"Inna," said Blandina, turning suddenly round, "I have observed of late that thou hast been more desirous than is seemly in one of thy calling to pry into the actions of thy superiors. Tell me, my good wench, has anyone been tampering with thy fidelity?"

It was fortunate for Inna that a summons to attend her lady spared her the guilt of another falsehood. Early in the afternoon, on the arrival of Inna's *soi-disant* brother, Sister Eva allowed the thoughtless girl to leave the convent, and stood watching them as they crossed the court. "There they go," she said mentally; "a comely pair, but they never called the same man father. Thirty years ago I wot of another such pair. Well, I will be no tell-tale. Had there never been such, thou, O Heinrich Hoffgarten, hadst not slept on the bloody battle-field, nor Rowena von Rheinstadt been a nun in this Abbey of Koenigsfelden." And here she heaved so deep a sigh as would have perilled her popularity, and wiped away tears that memory alone could have drawn from her laughing eyes. She then joined her sister nuns in the recreation parlour, where she found the Princess and Sister Ethelinda.

Father Swithin and his *Pyramus* had decorated the apartment, with due honour to the festival of Sister Teresa, who had just completed the fiftieth anniversary of her cloisterhood—a little old woman bent double by age and infirmity; so that the wreath of fresh flowers which encircled her poor shaking head seemed as if placed there in derision. Four obsequious nuns conducted this heroine of the day to the throne prepared for her. Struggling for breath, and nearly exhausted, she looked round for a few minutes with a vacant stare.

"There! there!" she muttered, as she disengaged herself from her officious handmaidens, "that will do! What has the wench placed on my head? Diamonds? They are my mother's. Take them back again, and give me my hood and veil."

“Poor soul!” said the portress, “she fancies this is the day of her profession, and not that of her jubilee.” And hereupon she and the other nuns did their best to convince the poor creature of her delusion.

“Profession?” repeated the aged nun, and she now spoke in Italian. “Did I not tell you so? it was the day, too, of Bianca’s betrothal. Oh, how beautiful she looked as she knelt to petition our parents to spare me! but they would not hear even her. They said I was deformed and dowerless, and they hid me from the light of day. I have not seen the sun for fifty years; but I will go out to-day. Did ye not promise I should do as I listed to-day?” But she struggled in vain to free herself from restraining arms, until, conscious of her weakness, she suffered herself to be replaced on her chair of state. Here, however, the Princess interposed to entreat that no coercion might be used to detain her against her wishes, and, as she spoke, the poor nun fixing her eyes on the countenance of the lovely pleader, exclaimed, “Agnes of Hapsburg, hast thou learned pity? Oh, may thou, then, find mercy!”

“Dear mother,” said Sister Ethelinda, “it is our gracious Princess Bertha who joins with me in begging you to seek your rest; you have overtired your strength already.”

“What have I said?” asked the poor nun. “My kind Ethelinda, my gracious Princess, I fear I have caused you both uneasiness;” then, bursting into tears, she added, “Forgive me, for I am a poor demented creature. May God have mercy on us all.”

“Poor Teresa!” said Ethelinda, her eyes filling with tears as they watched the feeble form almost borne from the room she was never again to enter, “I foresaw all this. She had a fresh seizure last night, and ought not to have left her cell; but our sisters were unwilling to lose their rare holiday.”

“Did she profess unwillingly?” asked Bertha.

“If so, she never betrayed the secret. She was strict in the performance of all her duties, severe in penance, silent and reserved, until her late attacks have changed her into a garrulous old woman.”

“She was Italian?”

“ Yes ; she came from my bright clime ; but these are the first accents I ever heard her utter of our mother tongue. The Abbess once told me the name of the noble but decayed house from which she sprang, together with a few particulars of its history. I will relate them at a time of more leisure, but crave permission to leave you, my Princess, for a few minutes on an errand of importance.”

When the nun left her, Bertha looked with increased dejection on the sisterhood of poor recluses that sat around. Many were old and infirm, some of them young, and here and there might be seen a face and form of undeniable beauty ; but even youth and beauty had a something unnaturally out of place, and age had deeper furrows and a more gaunt outline. There was no soft shading between youth and middle age. Want of exercise and unwholesome diet had in many instances shriveled, in others blanched or bloated the form. The mind, too, shrunk and enfeebled, and shut out from rational sources of improvement and recreation, found pleasure in the most childish bauble, and occupation in the lowest superstition. Such was the interior of a convent in the dark ages, such was it even in the early part of our present century, and such it will be at its close. Monastic laws and customs change not ; and human minds acted on by the same influences will exhibit the same results. Alas, how many a dream of cloistered repose and sublimated devotion has been dissipated, all too late, by a closer intimacy with the separated and the consecrated !

When the refection of cakes and sweetmeats was served, Father Anselmo, the confessor of the novices, and two or three of the elder priests joined the party, and contributed evidently to its hilarity, if not to its edification. With the sanction of the former, Gertruda withdrew with the Princess to spend the remaining hour in a farewell stroll through the convent garden. The friends first bent their steps to the side of the ever-flowing fountain, and paused to speak of her who had so often watched the play of its waters with them—the aunt of one fair girl, the friend and preceptress of both. They

next threaded the bowery walk, climbed the grassy mound, and finally sat down on the mossy seat at the entrance of the grotto at its foot

“How pleasant is this calm!” said Bertha, “how fragrant this evening hour! My spirits need its refreshment and its balm after the shock of poor Teresa’s wanderings. Gertruda, it may seem childish to thee, as it does to my own sober reason, but I feel a terror I cannot conquer when reminded of my likeness to my aunt. Oh! if I should become”—She stopped on recollecting Gertruda had not shared the awful disclosure of that aunt’s crimes, and added, “Sing to me, love; my spirit wants your sweet notes to chase the folly that has chafed it.”

“Do you mean the somewhat intrusive mirth of our poor sisters? Yet Father Anselmo tells us their holiday pastimes are pleasing offerings to the saints and angels. He tells us, too, that they differ widely from the intoxicating pleasures of the world.”

“I see not how, unless the flavour be less;” and Bertha added abstractedly, “I can somewhat understand the pious breathings of a separate and subdued spirit like that of my sainted preceptress and the tender Ethelinda. I can even believe the gloomy soul of my aunt may find a fitting resting-place in a cloister. But such poor fluttering beings as we have erewhile quitted seem to have beat their wings against their wiry cage until, ruffled and exhausted, they have lost the power, and almost the desire of flight. O Gertruda, I would spare *thee* from such a fate.”

The novice fixed her tearful eyes on the speaker, but said calmly, “The bird bred in prison is, I believe, incapable of the full enjoyment of liberty; for do you not remember, when your favourite dove escaped from the cot, how the wild birds chafed her, until she was glad to return, and ask for readmittance? Like her, I shall come back a willing captive to my prison.”

“Thou shalt come back of thine own will or not with mine, my gentle dove. But now sing thy vesper song to the echo of these vaulted rocks.”

Gertruda complied, and sang, with corresponding sweetness and simplicity, the following lines to the well-known tune of the Vesper Hymn of the locality.

vesper hymn.

The last notes of Gertruda's singularly melodious voice had scarcely ceased ere a pipe or whistle, seemingly issuing from the low brushwood which fringed the roof of the grotto, repeated the air with clearness and accuracy.

"It must be Henga," said one of the delighted listeners.

"Impossible," said the Princess, scanning the lofty cavern. "Naught but a bird or a fairy could hide beneath these ferns and mosses."

"But birds do not sing vesper hymns, my Princess, nor fairies either, for aught I have ever heard of their folk-lore."

"Hist, hist! I hear something stir!" They were silent. A few preluding notes, and the air was repeated clearly and sweetly as before. Gertruda still maintained that Henga, and

Henga alone, could have produced such magic strains, relating in support of her opinion, together with many instances of his wonderful talents, his sudden appearances in many parts of the garden.

Thus playfully jesting, the fair girls entered the convent; but their cheerful voices ceased and their smiles vanished as they reached the door of the Abbess's apartment. She had left it for the choir, where some special services were to be performed on Gertruda's account, as a guard against the enchantments of the world she was to enter on the morrow. Thither she accordingly repaired, whilst the Princess sought her own chamber.

It was said by one,* deep read in the mysteries of mind, that we never leave any place, or do any oft-repeated duty, be it pleasant or otherwise, for the last time without regret. It was this *last time* that threw a shade of melancholy over Bertha's spirit, as she prepared to retire to rest within the walls of Koenigsfelden.

* Dr. Samuel Johnson.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BROTHERS.

*My birthright? Nay, rather for his ransom
Ask my life-blood, and I will give it thee.*

ABOUT three miles from the Abbey of Koenigsfelden, at that period of history which we have chosen for the foundation of our tale, stood the castle of Habicht, or Hapsburg, "the cradle," as it is usually designated, of the House of Austria: "the hut of his fathers," as the founder of their greatness, the Emperor Rudolph, named it in somewhat proud humility. Cradle or hut, however, it was a befitting abode for a race of giants, if we may judge from the ruins still extant: a solitary tower, whose walls are some eight feet thick, and a few ruined but spacious apartments, whose crumbling walls are scrawled over with the names of the numerous tourists who yearly visit the spot. This "Tower of the Hawk" is finely situated at the extremity of a steep mountain ridge, jutting out into the vast plain below, and commanding an entire view of its extent, flanked by some of the highest of the Swiss mountains. The monotony of this plain is relieved by many conical hills, rising abruptly to a very considerable height, and crowned by the castles of the feudal nobles whose names are engraved on the history of the period. But the most interesting object is where, stretching far into the west, the glacier streams of the Aar, the Reuss, and the Limmat join, near whose confluence the Roman city Vindonessa was built. Barbarian hands had pulled down every stone of this once celebrated city, long before the time of our story; but the picturesque town of Brugg and the Abbey of Koenigsfelden have arisen on its site. "Leaving," in the language of the

historian,* “the philosophic traveller to compare the monuments of Roman conquest, of feudal or Austrian tyranny, of monkish superstition, and of industrial freedom, and to applaud the merit and liberty of our own time,” we invite our more imaginative readers to lay the reins on the neck of Fancy, and to range with us over the picturesque country which surrounds the ruined Tower of Hapsburg; to plunge into the shade of the ancient wood which clothes the steep ascent, and, whilst the moaning breeze of an autumnal evening sighs amongst the decaying foliage, to yield to the spell that works around. Seated on a fragment of the fallen building, with that sorceress’s aid, we shall see the shadows of the mighty dead mingle with the curling mist—stone after stone resume its position in the structure, till the whole arises again to its mediæval grandeur. And, lo! the drawbridge is lowered, the portal opens; we enter the low-browed arch, climb the winding stairs, and, with eyes still dazzled with the sunny landscape without, endeavour to penetrate to the remotest corner of a spacious hall, whose walls are overlaid with ponderous suits of armour, surrounded by helmet, lance, and shield, and emblazoned with the arms and devices of the knights who bore them. From massive beams, blackened by age and smoke, hang many a bannered trophy of skill and valour; whilst around and above the enormous chimney we behold, ranged with order and taste, every gradation of murderous weapon then in use, from the delicate stiletto to the ponderous Swiss two-handed sword; some rusty from the foeman’s blood, others retaining their fine Damascene polish and jewelled hilt. Interspersed are quivers of various workmanship, filled with arrows tipped with gold.

Such an apartment, and so furnished, once existed in the Fortress of Hapsburg, and in every castle or fort of note in those warlike times. In this the narrow loophole casements, with their small panes of stained glass, rendered still dimmer by cross iron bars, admitted so little light that

* Gibbon.

the eye was not long detained by its gloomy decorations from a noble bay-window which terminated the hall, and commanded an extensive and richly-varied landscape of hill and dale, forest and glade, bounded by a distant range of mountains; the seeming jeopardy of its position, for it jutted out boldly and abruptly from the walls of the tower, several feet above their base, giving it the appearance of being hung in air. The recess formed by its arch and sides was approached by steps leading from the hall below, draped, and not inappropriately, after the manner of an eastern pavilion; since it was the depository of some cabinets of costly articles wrought in gold and ivory, reported to have been spoils of war taken by Albert Landgrave of Alsace, the earliest crusader of the House of Hapsburg. But the prime ornament of the alcove was its finely-arched window, representing, in colours which modern art confesses it cannot rival, the right marvellous history of the Saintess Hilda. At the time we describe the rays of a noontide sun, chastened in their progress through the violet-stained glass, fell on the three living figures who occupied the pavilion, and who, viewed from the further end of the gloomy hall, with their appropriate framing, produced the effect of a fine painting.

The noblest figure of the group, the Archduke Frederick, stood with his back resting against the window-frame, seeming to regard with deep attention the countenances of his two brothers, Leopold and Albert, the latter of whom read aloud, from a roll of parchment spread on a table before them, that which appeared to be in no degree palatable to his impatient hearer. From time to time, Leopold interrupted his brother with expressions of vehement disapproval and passionate invective, or muttered his deep imprecations between his firmly-closed teeth. Yet, he whom he thus addressed was one formed rather to disarm than to provoke angry feeling; for well had this grandson of the great Rudolph earned his appellation of "Albert the Wise." During the scene we have described, this remarkable person was seated in a ponderous chair, which, notwithstanding its eider-down cushions, offered no luxurious

couch to limbs palsied from early youth. The impress of intellectual power and mild benevolence on the countenance of the sufferer, however, amply atoned for the absence of strength and activity. Habitual pain had not "written defeatures" on his high smooth brow, but it had imparted an expression of shaded softness to his eyes, and a look that asked, and seldom in vain, for sympathy. Wholly free from the insolence of dictation, his wise and steady counsel was sought by all. Even the humble and timid gained confidence by perceiving that his own weakness and dependence had taught him to sympathize with the need and infirmities of others. The bashful maiden, encouraged by his gentle voice to trust her own, hung delightedly over the chair of the invalid; the unhidden child found in him a ready and skilful playmate, and the very dog would instinctively fly from the spurning foot to shelter himself under his couch. But, as already intimated, there was one fiery spirit who disowned the gentle spell. This was the indignant listener, whose diminutive stature, harsh features, and somewhat warped figure (were not the portrait strictly historical) might seem to have been introduced into this *tableau vivant* for the purpose of strong contrast. Nevertheless, in an age when physical proportions and outward comeliness maintained more than their fair preponderance in man's estimation, the Archduke Leopold had gained for himself the title of "the glory of chivalry." Losing sight, on the present occasion, of its fairest attribute, courtesy, he rudely broke in on the reader, and, partially covering with one hand the offending manuscript, exclaimed,—

"Peace! I pray thee, peace! Little does it become a son of the Emperor Rudolph to listen to, still less to propound, terms so disgraceful as these. Louis of Bavaria shall have an answer traced in blood."

"Patience, sweet brother," pleaded Albert mildly. "Were it not truer wisdom to examine his proposals than to provoke his wrath? The crown on his head, our brother his captive, we must renounce all claim to the one, or rivet the chains of the other."

Saying this, and breathing a deep sigh, he looked with melancholy affection at Frederick, whose eye, raised as if in brief appeal to Heaven, turned as before its steady gaze on his brothers.

“And what does Louis dare to ask?” inquired Leopold petulantly.

“Conquerors, my brother,” replied Albert, “do not ask; they command.”

“And slaves obey. I tell thee, Albert, so dearly do I tender our right that, were all the powers of darkness leagued against it, I would but hug it closer. Ay, brothers mine, were the imperial diadem on the head of the foul fiend himself, I would pluck it thence to plant it on that brow from which it was unjustly torn !”

“Alas!” sighed Albert, “that the Emperor would have ransomed our brother at any meaner price! Except the one demanded, there is no sacrifice we would not make, and deem it all too light.” He paused awhile, then added, as he put aside the offending parchments, “Speak thy will, Leopold. Is it to renounce all claim for thee and thine to the crown thy grandsire won, and which murderous hands tore from thy father’s head?”

“Never!” exclaimed Leopold in a voice that rang through the hall, whilst, with an effort no less disproportionate to his stature, he drew his ponderous two-handed sword and brandished it round his head. “Never! even though this trusty blade fall from my nerveless hand! Never! though heaven and earth conspire to—”

“Forbear, Frederick,” said Albert, on observing the intemperance of their younger brother had overcome his forbearance. “Let us not pursue this conference longer. Let our chafed tempers have time to settle, and our hot brains leisure to cool. And then, my beloved Frederick, weigh well our grandsire’s counsel and his practice: ‘Once only can it be said of any human effort, “*This is the time!*”’* Thy time is

* “*Dis est die Zeit*,” a favourite axiom of Rudolph’s.

not yet arrived. Make no imprudent resolves, bind thyself by no rash vows. Louis has accorded thee two months' liberty ere he demand thy fiat. Enjoy it, dear brother, and leave resolve and action to us."

"Revenge to me," interrupted Leopold; "and, trust me, ere the waning of those brief moons, so graciously accorded, the beacon-fires on a hundred hills shall supply their light. Ay, they shall climb from summit to summit, until they kindle amid Alpine snows! *Then* let the royal jailer come to claim his captive! Fritz," he continued, as he grasped his brother's hand till the blood seemed ready to burst from the finger-tips, "I cannot sign, but I will fight for thee!"

Frederick embraced both his brothers in silence; then, throwing open the casement, said, "Where is my Bertha? She should be here to welcome the captive."

"Ah, my sweet niece!" said Albert. "And now I bethink me of another expectant of her gentle presence. Thou art aware, brother, that the King of Naples also is desirous of securing this rare jewel for his son, and sends hither to treat for it."

The father's eye was bent on the court beneath; the affection of the parent had banished the solicitude of the politician.

"We will not barter it without a full equivalent," interrupted Leopold, as if inspired by sudden hope. "We must have the value paid in halberdines and archers. It would be a pity, as the tardy aspirant shows signs of retreat, that we should not be beforehand with him; perchance, as the crown of Bohemia now approaches his brows, he thinks it would not become him to wed an ex-emperor's daughter."

Frederick turned a look of reproach on his brother: "This jesting is ill-timed, Leopold."

"By my troth, I jest not. In sober sadness, Frederick, you will not allow the promise made under circumstances so diverse to bind you, when there are so many cogent reasons for breaking through its flimsy bonds?"

"I can allow of no circumstance that should or could justify

a Christian man, be he prince or peasant, from failing in his word: mine was pledged long ago to Prince John, and if the bond be broken, it must be by mutual consent."

"And I have sworn on a sword more stainless than his, that never whilst I can draw it from its scabbard will I consent that he shall mingle his foul puddle with the pure blood of the lineage of Hapsburg."

"Leopold, Leopold!" exclaimed Albert, "is this the welcome thou giv'st thy long-absent brother? Let us at least enjoy a few moments of reunion ere thou sowest the seeds of discord."

"Ay, dear brothers mine," said Frederick in a voice of mournful expostulation, "spare me to enjoy my daughter's love for a brief space, ere you make a sordid barter of it." He turned again to the window. The sound of horses' hoofs reached it from the paved court below, and in another minute the father and daughter were clasped in each other's arms.

This meeting of the returned captive and his only child was of no common interest, as the circumstances under which they had parted were of no common peril, and the love that united them was of no ordinary stamp. Hedged in by etiquette, and denied all approach to those intimacies which, under ordinary circumstances, lead to elective friendships, it is not unfrequent to find amongst the members of a royal circle remarkable instances of family affection. This golden chain of domestic union was never more firmly linked than in the family of Hapsburg, of which their history furnishes many examples; one deviation, in the case of Albert's treatment of his unfortunate nephew, John of Suabia, forming a melancholy and patent exception. But if in the children of the murdered Albert pity and veneration had swelled into revenge and mad superstition, the same feelings in the succeeding generation—yea, a pity more melting, a veneration more unselfish, the result of different influences—were shown in the devoted tenderness of the Princess Bertha towards her highly-gifted and yet more unfortunate father. To the superficial observer it might seem as if some adverse power had interfered to mar

the destiny of one so illustrious through the triple advantages of birth, talent, and personal beauty ; but the Christian will construe differently the severe discipline that followed a youth of singular prosperity, issuing in his unfortunate contest for the iron crown, his defeat at the battle of Muhldorf, and subsequent imprisonment of three years in the fortress of Transmutz in the upper Palatinate : three years of solitude and reflection, during which he had leisure to lay to heart his culpable neutrality in the bloody acts of revenge and cupidity perpetrated by his brethren, and to meditate on the fleeting nature of human enjoyments, the shifting sand of earthly possessions. Captivity, disappointment, and regret had somewhat impaired that comeliness which had gained for its possessor the title of "the beautiful," and left their impress on the Archduke's once-faultless features.

These, though still remarkable for their delicate and patrician outline, lacked the marble roundness with which they were combined in the countenance of his daughter. Yet there subsisted between them a strong personal resemblance. She looked what he might have been in the flush of early boyhood ; or rather, the affinity was such as the soft, pensive visitant of our dreams bears to the now time-worn companion of our bygone years. Although, as may be supposed, far different was the tearful gaze of the daughter from the look of delighted surprise which her own increased loveliness had called up from her admiring parent, yet the result of their opposing emotions was the same ; the reciprocal vow rose from the heart to the lips of both—"We will never part again."

The little court of Hapsburg—hardly outnumbering, and greatly inferior in elegance and convenience to the establishment of many a noble, and even gentle of our day—had been grievously thinned during the captivity of its sovereign ; the news of whose return now sped joyfully amongst his vassals and neighbours.

As is required on such occasions, vigorous preparations were made to demonstrate the universal joy ; and politic brains

were taxed to suck the best advantage out of the popular favour. Whatever were the secret views of the two younger princes, nothing transpired beyond their avowed intention to contribute heartily towards the general hilarity, and to promote the restoration of the captive to health and cheerfulness.

The day of Bertha's return to her home was one of family reunion, and was rendered still more delightful to her by the companionship of Gertruda, and the unexpected arrival of her two lively young cousins, twin daughters of her uncle Leopold, the Princesses Alice and Aletta, who had been summoned to share the coming festivities of the little court, as well as to ornament and enliven it. The marked protection and favour of the Archduchess enabled poor Gertruda to bear with tolerable courage the ordeal of this new world, and the good-humoured raillery of the two little madcap princesses; still, for tastes vary, and habit is even stronger than nature, the shrinking novice was rejoiced, when the noonday meal was over, to accept the invitation of the Archduchess to accompany her to the chapel, and join in the celebration of a *novaine* of thanksgiving, which that devout lady had vowed for her husband's return.

Ardent in her feelings, but weak in judgment, this princess was precisely a subject for priestly denomination; which subjugated her mind, although it could not control her affections. This weakness of character was evidenced by her bigoted devotion to the forms of her religion, and her ignorant neglect of its active duties; whilst the indulgence of ceaseless tears, no less than the practice of long fasts, endless services, and late vigils, had dimmed the eyes which should have gladdened with their light a husband's return. In like manner, though really attached to her step-daughter, the Princess Bertha, the vigorous cast of mind, and early habits of investigation evinced by her, filled her step-mother with apprehension, and made them such uncongenial companions that she rarely summoned her from her convent, and, when visiting it, found the society of the nuns more to her taste.

It argues either strong sense or utter insensibility never to feel jealous ; nor is it to be wondered at that some touch of this disquieting feeling should have found its way amongst the congenial thoughts and virtues of the Archduchess's character, or that she could not help viewing the absorbing tenderness of Frederick for his daughter as the reflex of that he had borne her mother.

Oh, it calls for some magnanimity to tolerate a rival, even in the grave !

CHAPTER X.

THE CAVE OF ST. HILDA.

Turn, gentle hermit of the dale,
And guide our lonely way
To where yon taper cheers the vale
With hospitable ray.

At the time the Archduchess repaired with her favourite to the chapel, the rest of the party disposed of themselves no less characteristically. The sprightly sisters retired to call a cabinet of tire-women to investigate the state of their wardrobe, now likely to have such heavy calls on it. The Archdukes, Albert and Leopold, remained in council. Frederick and his daughter descended the tower-steps, and plunged together into the depths of the surrounding forest. Bertha had never before felt so happy. Of her father's liberation—so often promised, so hopelessly deferred—she now realized the blissful certainty; besides which, she was released from the bondage of conventional rule and her aunt's presence; and she felt like Parnell's Edwin, "a-dancing as he walked," albeit the overgrown path might be unfavourable to either of these modes of progression. Yet, even amid the fullness of her young joy, she was a stranger to the deep happiness that swelled the breast of the lately-freed captive. To him the air, the light, the grass that rose again beneath his footsteps, the birds pouring out their little songs and wandering at pleasure, the blushing briar, and the woodbine that lavished its sweet breath on the passer-by—all, all around seemed symbolical of his recovered liberty.

"What if we pursue this path?" said he, as he abruptly turned down into a green and tangled dell; "it leads to one of my boy-day haunts, though thorns and briars have, I see, invaded that primrose path with the rest. But what

reck I when I have so brave and loyal a follower?" he added, as he turned to admire the grace and skill with which Bertha insinuated her light figure through all opposing difficulties. "Why, my Bertha, thou art worthy to follow him thou lovest to the battle-field, as thy mother—thy *own* mother, love—many a time prayed to be allowed to do. What sayest thou, maiden? hast thou ever dreamt of one for whom toil would turn to pleasure?"

Love being a theme on which fathers rarely descant, unless there happen to be an eligible suitor in ambush, Bertha either did not, or affected not, to understand the drift of the question, and hastily replied, "I would fain be like my sweet mother in all things. Blandina discourses of her so often, that, babe as I was, I seem to have some sweet memories, some angel whisperings of her."

"Ah! thy faithful nurse, how fares she?"

"Well, and, as ever, my trustiest friend."

"And thy preceptress?"

"Gone to join her kindred spirits in heaven."

The Duke breathed a soft *requiescat*, and the pair walked on some way in silence. A shade had come over the spirit of the captive, which even recovered liberty could not dissipate. The recollection of Adelaide von Balm was accompanied by burning memories of the past, and heavy responsibilities for the future. He now roused himself to meet that which occupied the first place in his heart—the future of his daughter.

"Do I not hear the murmur of a brook, Bertha?"

"Assuredly; and methinks the water-sprite hath an accompanying melody. Listen; I certainly can distinguish two separate strains."

"It is Echo," observed the Duke, yielding himself, though not without effort, to the sportive vein, "imploring us not to break in on her solitude. Yes, here *is* the cave; but the Saint has permitted the ivy and the bramble to shut out her votaries. 'Tis thus, my Bertha, that princes too oft encourage the fawning parasite to close the entrance against truer friends. Here is the tell-tale stream," he continued, pursuing

the moral parallel, "in which I have so often snared the speckled trout ; with more skill, alas ! than I have since angled among men. We will rest awhile upon its flowery banks." Frederick drew his companion into an open space, where the stream glided through a glade studded with fruit-trees (principally of the pear and apple, now loaded with their glowing produce), whose rich green pasture was gemmed with tufts of the lilac blossom of the autumnal crocus. "Here is a carpet that mocks the labours of the loom," he added.

"And what is more," observed the happy girl, as she placed herself by his side, "it is said that soothing virtues can be distilled from its blossoms. I have heard that the Hermit Celestine—"

The Duke interrupted her with great interest to ask if the venerable man yet lived ; then, as if one subject chased or called up the other, he exclaimed, "Oh, that you and I, my poor child, might henceforward inhabit this region of blessed liberty ! "

"And shall we not, now that you are returned ? "

There was a tone of alarm in Bertha's voice as she asked this question, and her cheek grew pale as her father answered hesitatingly, "For a time, my love. But of this we will speak hereafter. At present, I would know whether you are apprised of the motive which induced me to withdraw you from your convent ? " The banished rose resumed its place on the maiden's cheek, and deepened as the catechism proceeded. "Your preceptress, the now sainted Adelaide von Balm," said the father, with emotion, "doubtless spoke to you of the proposed visit of your betrothed suitor, and explained his errand to our court."

"Dearest father," said Bertha reproachfully, "and must you needs talk of separation on the first day of our reunion ? "

"Alas, dear child, necessity has little sympathy with human feelings ; and, at this moment, it concerns us both very nearly to ascertain the nature of yours towards John of Bohemia—" He hesitated, and then continued with rather more freedom, "He is a goodly person—of warm temper and

hasty blood, I grant; but these qualities should not prejudice him in a maiden's eye, seeing his valour is ever ready to support the claims of his arrogance." Again the speaker paused, without receiving a reply. Perhaps he might deem it somewhat unreasonable to expect one, and therefore prompted it by a more direct question. "Answer me, maiden. Might Prince John—now expectant King of Bohemia—hope to find grace in thy sight?"

"I knew him only in early youth, my father, when I was myself but a child. Yet I do remember he was gentle and condescending to my cousins and me, although he numbered twice our years. I bethink me, too—for this it behoves me more especially to notice—of his gallant encounter with the maddened boar; and that, when my life was perilled, his aid was prompt and fortunate."

The Duke looked anxiously at his daughter. "Did gratitude, my Bertha, deepen into favour?" but perceiving her heightened colour, he added, "I will not probe too deeply. I wish to satisfy myself that no other suitor usurped the grace the Prince comes here to crave."

"Another suitor?" and here the dignity of the Princess overcame the bashfulness of the maiden. "And who would dare become such to your betrothed daughter? But, my father, if the King of Bohemia has forfeited the favour, nay preference, you showed Prince John; or if he himself desires to be free—"

"My Bertha will find many a suitor to fill his place. But I aver not that he would yield it. A messenger, it is true, arrived from him erewhile, announcing and regretting that state affairs would delay his arrival somewhat."

"I am thankful for this respite," exclaimed Bertha, with a smile that verified the assertion. "For awhile, at least, I shall be solely thine."

"Thou hast no mistrust?"

"Of what? That my father would weary of my company? Or mean you, of the honour of a true knight, which is as bright as his sword? My father, thy Bertha is no spend-

thrift of her affection; but when she gives it, she gives her trust with it. You betrothed your young daughter to the Prince of your choice, and bade her esteem him as such. How, then, is it possible I could doubt his truth?"

Probably Bertha did not attach so much meaning to her words as her father did. He made no answer, for he felt accused, humbled, disappointed. He saw in Bertha's truthful artlessness a deeper interest in her betrothed than he thought it possible she could feel after so long an absence; but he forgot the injunction he had given to her preceptress to keep up that interest, and knew nothing of other interests that had fostered it. John of Luxemburg had been the son-in-law of his choice; and though he had not seen him since the bright promise of his youth, and circumstances had occurred which made him desirous of otherwise disposing of his daughter's hand, could he in honour withdraw it to place it in that of another? It is true that the contract of betrothal was oftener broken than fulfilled, but Frederick was too upright to fail in his word, least of all to the generous prince who had kept his engagement under such altered circumstances as all Europe would have acquitted him for failing to do. Occupied with these perplexing balancings, he walked on silently by his daughter's side, who, it will be believed, was not without food for rumination also.

The sun had by this time left the horizon, while she whom the poet fancifully calls his "soft-eyed sister," a newly-risen moon, slightly silvered the edge of the forest, and was reflected in the stream. The gentle murmuring of the water alone broke the otherwise perfect silence, until a soft strain of distant music mingled with it; and Bertha, desirous of rousing her father from his reverie, said, with returning gaiety,—

"Now, dear father, thou must allow that my fairy minstrel outdoes St. Hilda's echo, and, moreover, wants no prompting. Only observe with what skill and taste he runs over the magic scale."

After a few wild symphonies of the most enchanting caprice, which from their muffled sweetness seemed to proceed

from the depths of the cave, there stole on the ear the tones of a low melodious voice, such as

"The listener held his breath to hear."

yet of such peculiar quality as to elude the nomenclature of modern science either to class or describe. No wonder, then, if a young maiden of lively fancy, living in an age and country peopled with such phenomena, should be willing to believe that it proceeded from the throat of the Spirit of the Bush. Fortunately the fairy minstrel had chosen to clothe his imaginings in German words, desirous, no doubt, to convey instruction to mortal ears. The following is but an imperfect translation of

THE SONG OF THE SPIRIT OF THE BUSH.

"When the linnet sings,
 When the violet springs,
 When the wild rose is blushing ;
 When to the ear,
 In music clear,
 The ceaseless stream is gushing—
 What do they say ?
 'We fleet away,
 But thou, O man, improve thy passing day !'

When the olive yields,
 Or, 'mid harvest fields,
 The ripened ear is glowing ;
 When from the vine,
 With luscious wine,
 The press is overflowing—
 Their cheerful voice
 Bids man 'rejoice,
 But not on earth's vain joys to fix his choice.'

When the sun hath sped
 To his ocean bed,
 And the night-dews are weeping ;
 When, through the sky,
 The moon on high
 Her silent course is keeping—
 Ancient of days !
 They bid man 'raise
 His soul to Thee, in awe and silent praise.'"

"Thy sprite utters good counsel as well as soft sounds," observed the Duke when the music ceased; "but we must not allow him to rob us of any more of our twilight hour."

"Yet have I a foolish longing to follow him into his lurking-place."

"It would, I assure thee, be a vain effort. I have been baffled in the attempt to creep through the brake when a prying urchin, as curious, and even slenderer than thou. The minstrel must have reached the cave from above. Be comforted; we will cause him to be brought to-morrow to the Castle, and thou shalt be the judge if his skill be worthy of encouragement. We must now thread our homeward way."

This was no easy matter. The branches and long grass had again closed over their lately-opened path; and the wanderers, after many ineffectual attempts to find it, determined to return in the direction of the cave, on the speculation of engaging the services of its hidden musician, either as guide or messenger. After a long struggle, they discerned the glimmering of a distant light, and succeeded in reaching a projecting rock, from which the ivy and other climbing plants had been cleared to give free passage to the rays of the friendly lamp, whose hospitable ray had directed their bewildered steps, and now enabled them to read the following inscription engraved on its pedestal—

"To the benighted and weary, rest and welcome."

"What sayest thou?" asked the Duke, "Shall we accept the invitation?"

"Willingly."

"Now St. Hilda protect us!" and the Duke bent his lofty head to enter the low arch which formed an entrance to a long passage cut in the rock. His companion followed, undauntedly groping her way for a considerable distance, until her conductor stopped, and bade her listen.

"It is the voice of prayer," she whispered. "We may fearlessly proceed."

They did so, and the passage continued to widen until it expanded into a rude chapel. Several flambeaux of pine-wood illuminated the simple altar, and threw out in strong relief from the deep shade around a figure which knelt at it. It was that of the aged Hermit. He was clothed in a flowing gown, fastened round the waist by a leathern girdle. His form was tall and upright, and his hair, which it is scarcely metaphorical to term silvery, reached to his shoulders. His eyebrows retained their original colour, and, clearly defined on his high brow, slightly overhung eyes of the same dark hue, softened but not dimmed by age. Over a face singularly healthful and placid might scarcely be traced the minute scoring of the hand of Time; but it bore no evidence of stormy passion or corroding care. Altogether the aged man bore more the appearance of a seer or patriarch than of a monk or ascetic—of one whose religion was that of active charity rather than of outward forms; of one who could not imagine a God of purity could be honoured by such repugnant habits as characterized the devotee of those days. Devotion and love were the guiding principles of the Hermit of St. Hilda, and his life was spent in the exercise of both. The holy abstraction of his deportment was accompanied by such melting sympathy with the sufferings and sorrows of humanity, that he was approached by the crowd of humble supplicants that daily visited his cell as a beneficent being, whose heavenly mission it was to shed blessing and peace on all around. Few indeed were the children of sorrow who did not feel their grief lightened by the sympathy and council of the good Hermit Celestine. As the wanderers approached, he arose, and reverently saluting them he said,—

“Frederick of Hapsburg, I bid your highness welcome!”

The Duke graciously returned the salutation.

Then turning to Bertha, “The heart’s desire and prayer of an aged man rest on thy head, my daughter: the blessing of the poor is already thine.”

Bertha bent low to receive the valued benediction, for she had long known and reverenced the holy man, and it entered

warm into her father's heart. The noble guests were now invited to enter the Hermit's cell, which was divided by an osier screen from the chapel, and, like that, hollowed out of the rock. Its humble appointments were not deficient in order or comfort. An ample pile of logs crackled on the hearth, near which were arranged a few culinary utensils. A long array of jars and other coarse earthenware vessels occupied the rude shelves of pine-wood attached to the sides of the cave, and held, amongst other materials of the good man's *pharmacopœia*, a quantity of dried herbs, destined, in their turn, to supply an alembic which now shed an aromatic fragrance all around, as its condensed fumes fell in pearly drops from the spiral tube. In a recessed nook of the cave, a lamp suspended from the roof threw its light on the figure of a young man, apparently an itinerant minstrel, engaged in the perusal of an illuminated manuscript, but who, at the entrance of the visitors, started up, and passing them with a graceful obeisance, rapidly quitted the cavern.

"I have seen that countenance before, or one resembling it," thought Bertha; "but where?"

Perhaps her father thought the same; but turning to the Hermit, he simply observed, "Thou art not alone, Father Celestine. Thy companion has no mean skill in the tuneful art, if as I opine, it was he whose voice we heard in such sweet accord with St. Hilda's waterfall."

"There is not, sire, a goatherd along our plain but willingly joins us in our vesper song."

This evasive answer did not satisfy the questioner.

"Goatherd, forsooth! the Princess, as thou seest, is quite in anger at the term. She engaged my services just now to try and lure the minstrel to the Castle, so rapt was she with his melody; wilt thou not further her suit?"

"Who could resist such a petitioner?" said the Hermit, smiling benignantly on her; "Certes, not I; nor do I think the minstrel will. But the evening is chilly, and its dew has damped your garments; will it please ye to draw near the fire and partake of the hermit's frugal fare?"

The guests cordially accepted the offered hospitality.

“A scrip with fruits and herbs supplied,
And water from the spring.”

The spirits of the Archduke rose as he conversed of days gone by—of his visits to St Hilda’s fountain on his hunting or fishing excursions, when, tired and thirsty, he had begged a draught of her crystal spring. Once or twice he alluded to the trials of his after-life; but both the Hermit and Bertha anxiously avoided dwelling on painful subjects, and the conversation was sustained with cheerfulness until the arrival of some messengers, sent by the anxious Archduchess, reminded them how long they had been absent from the Castle. The Prince at parting promised the Hermit that he would soon repeat his visit, adding, “I have sore need of thy council and prayers, holy father, and I know thou wilt not begrudge me either.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE HAUNTED ORATORY.

No longer shall you gaze on't,
Lest your fancy may think anon it moves.

On reaching the castle, Frederick gave his daughter into the care of Blandina, who had provided suitable refreshment for her lady, which she took in her own apartments. Having dismissed her careful *factotum* for awhile to complete her unpacking, and feeling quite invigorated by her supper and change of garments, Bertha felt, as she sat alone ruminating on the eventful day just at its close, a strong desire to talk it over with her friend, and to relate to her the history of her late ramble in the forest. For this purpose, she sought her in her apartment, that was divided from her own by a large anteroom. This room had also two other doors, the one leading to the public staircase, the other to a little oratory at the top of a small turret, approached by a winding flight of stone steps. Recollecting that this little chapel had been fitted up by the Archduchess expressly for the use of the novice, on not finding her in her own room, the Princess sought and found Gertruda there, kneeling on the steps of an altar recessed in the wall of the tower, and blazing with wax lights. It was, moreover, surmounted by an image of the Virgin, nearly as large as life, and decked with a meretricious glitter ill assorting with the purity of her it pretended to represent.

“My dearest Princess,” said Gertruda, rising from her knees, “it seems to me I am safe only *here*. Let us kneel together at the shrine of our angelic guardian.”

“Not now; I came for converse. Come out on the balcony, and let us look on the beautiful world around, unshadowed, for the first time, by the gloom of Koenigsfelden.”

Bertha opened the casement, and pointed to the moonlit landscape, where dark masses of deep shadow were at intervals relieved by gleams of silvery light.

“Gertruda,” she continued, as she fixed her eyes on the moon, which seemed calmly to regard the sleeping world beneath, “methinks our pagan forefathers, in worshiping yonder planet as Queen of Heaven, found for her to whom our Church has attached the name, a far more significant emblem than such images as that, and others still more paltry, by which they are wont to represent and pray to her; for note thou well,” continued the beautiful enthusiast, forgetting in the loftiness of her subject all those matters of earthly interest she had come to discuss, and still more the shock such an unusual burst of eloquence would occasion her timid hearer; “mark thou well! the moon reflects, she does not originate light. Thus, the mother of our Lord—”

“Dearest Princess, does not our reverend father caution us not to give way to these dangerous promptings of the evil one? Did he not explain, that images are only meant to recall to the senses of the faithful those holy beings to whom, and not to their carved or painted representations, we address our supplications?”

“Ay, love,” said the Princess, with a quiet smile, “a hundred and a hundred times; and he tells us, as well, that obedience, and not reason, is our duty. But why shouldest thou or my lord Abbot condemn a desire to render these visible demonstrations, as I think the casuists call them, more consonant to taste and reason? Does yonder tawdry image rightly personate, thinkest thou, the modest Mother of God? What is there in it to recall her purity and motherly graces? As soon would I seek to substitute the fragrance and tints of the rose by wearing a gaudy sunflower in my bosom. But we will leave this painful subject, the only one on which we differ, and talk of the past day, which has opened a new and shadowy vista of my life—and thine too, perchance.”

“Shadows, we will trust, like those yonder, silvered by the

light of heaven," said Gertruda, as she pointed to the foliage of the forest glimmering in the moonbeams.

"True, the light is from heaven ; the shadows are of earth. Wherefore, then, deepen those shadows ? why dim that light by mists of man's interposition ? Why, when permitted to draw from the fountain, should we crave of another to bear it to our lips ? Nay, thou must hear me. Naught but that gushing stream can quench *my* thirst."

"Bertha ! my friend, my more than sister," exclaimed Gertruda, with clasped hands and cheeks blanched by holy fear, and turning, as she crossed herself, towards the image, "let me implore you not to yield yourself to these delusions of Satan!"

"Tranquillize thee, little trembler ! thou art my second self, and I only gave a voice to my idle musings ;" but, again relapsing into sober earnestness, the Princess added, "That thou mayst never forget this day, this notable day, thou shalt wear this crucifix in memory thereof. Take it, my sister-friend. It is made, so men say, of part of the wood on which He died who gave Himself for us. The figure was sculptured by the famous Florentine ; and the rosary has been blessed by the great Gregorius." The Princess would not allow Gertruda to decline the costly gift, saying, as she hung it at her side, "I need it not—an image that takes a thousand shapes from the fancy of as many cunning workmen cannot represent to my mind Him who is invisible."

"We entertain such only as the representative of His earthly form," said Gertruda, recurring to the oft-pleaded excuse.

"Neither for *this* ask I a sculptured image. Pain, sickness, suffering, want, all bear the impress of the 'man of sorrows.' Every accent of sympathy, every tear of pity, every word of exhortation, suffices to recall One who rejoiced with those who rejoiced, and wept with those who mourned."

"And does not His holy mother do so too ? Is not her heart and ear ever open to the cry of the desolate ?"

"It seemeth to my poor conceptions," answered the Princess solemnly—"and may Heaven forgive me if I blaspheme in

uttering them!—that it is the attribute of Deity alone to forgive sin. That Omniscience only can cast an unslumbering eye, or bend a hearing ear, on all His supplianting creatures, wherever dispersed or however—”

Gertruda laid her hand graspingly on the speaker’s arm. “For the love of Heaven, list! did you not hear a sigh?”

“Only that of the night breeze amongst the trees below.”

They were silent for a few seconds, when a deep-drawn sigh, almost a groan, was perceptible to the ear of both. Gertruda threw herself with a cry of terror at the foot of the imaged Virgin, from which it evidently proceeded, burying her face in the hollow of her clasped hands; but Bertha remained standing at her side, her lip a little quivering, and her cheek somewhat blanched, but her eye steadily fixed on the statue; and, as she gazed, one large crystal drop forced its way beneath the eyelid, and rolled slowly down. Still the heroic girl quailed not. Disdain, rather than fear, filled her soul; and, to prevent her trembling friend from witnessing what she even then believed to be a base illusion, practised to subjugate their reason, she extinguished the tapers, and hailed with delight the welcome appearance of Blandina, under whose conduct they reached the apartments below.

“One, two, three, four, five hours,” said the Princess, anxious to divert Gertruda’s mind, and counting them with graceful playfulness on her fingers; “surely we must each of us have a wonderful history to relate after such an unusual separation. I, for one, certainly have, and will begin. Sit down, dear nurse, and give me your attention, and the dear hand from which I have been so long parted.” The narrator then, with a grace we cannot imitate, and in that raciness and richness of diction, as inimitable as the carving and painting of mediæval art, described her forest’s losings and findings, the spirit’s singing, the hermit’s reception, the unknown minstrel; ending with what she knew would be most cheering to Gertruda, “I believe we might have remained in St. Hilda’s keeping until now, but for the sage direction of Henga, who, when the messengers, dispatched on all sides by the Arch-

duchess, sought us in the convent garden, bade them 'inquire at her shrine.' But now, fair lady, let me ask you why, when all the world was in motion and commotion at our loss, found I you, showing neither concern for our absence nor joy at our return?"

"My excuse is total ignorance of all cause of alarm. I remained some time with her highness in the chapel, and then went, at her gracious invitation, to partake of a slight refection with her in her bower. I then retired to the oratory, where you found me, and you know the rest."

A slight shudder shook the poor girl's slender form as she spoke, which Bertha observing, turned to Blandina for her account of the evening's adventures. She answered with her usual grave, sweet smile; though a light beamed beneath her shaded eye which gave a promise of interest or amusement in what she had to impart. As a preliminary, she took a small carved oaken casket from her capacious pocket, and placed it on the table, with the observation, "Of this more anon."

"I must first tell you my evening's occupation, prefacing it by saying it had always been a little compact between the good Seneschal and myself, that, on the first day of my liberation from the convent, I should have the loan of his dame's gentle little jennet, to carry me on a visit to the Hermit Celestine. Accordingly, when we had watched the departure of my Princess and her sire for their evening's ramble, the kind old man bade me prepare for mine, whilst he went in search of the little steed. He was a little behind the time proposed; but he accounted for it by the absence of the *junfer* who usually accompanies his dame, and his difficulty in finding another guide for the pretty creature. Oh, such a little beauty! as sleek as a dormouse, with feet like a fawn; and such a roguish eye, as it plunged its velvet nose into my pocket in search of apples, with which its mistress's apron is always well plenished. Nor must I forget the nets and tresses, the yellow saddle-cloth and gold fringe, of which the little Darling seemed as proud as their owner, who,

after I had mounted, led her down to the outer gate. And who do you think we found waiting at it?"

"Henga, Henga," cried Gertruda, clapping her hands.

"The same, and very steadily he guided my little palfrey, until we arrived at the broad road in the forest, when he dropped the leading rein, and Darling and I, glad of our liberty, ambled on together until we reached where the road branches off into three distinct paths, and being equally puzzled which to select, amicably resolved to stand still and wait till our guide made his appearance. This he did, after a while, from a thick brake, and in such a guise that, if Darling had not been the gravest little jennet that Andalusia ever bred, must have put my life in jeopardy. The boy seemed to me to be literally covered with winged creatures; the most prominent of which was an owl that had perched on the top of his head, and with becoming gravity kept her seat after her more volatile companions had flown off, at the sight of me and my palfrey; Henga accompanying their flight with strong expressions of indignation at their cowardice, and encouraging commendation of the owl's respectable gravity."

I fear Blandina would have forfeited Henga's good opinion for the same, and even his favourite Gertruda, could he have heard their merry laugh at his and the owl's expense, which was heartily joined in by Bertha, who begged a further history of the boy's vagaries; but, excepting an account of the homily he preached to two robins who were fighting over a worm, and his Solomon-like judgment in bestowing the contested prize on the meritorious owl, Blandina declared she must hasten onward to St. Hilda's Cave, "near the mouth of which," she went on to say, "we heard the sweet song of the water sprite, which you, my Principessa, described."

"And was it not very sweet?"

"Most sweet, and Henga was like one entranced. We saw the minstrel too; as comely a youth as ever the eye smiled on: somehow, or somewhere, I fancy I have seen his fellow."

"How I love thee for that, dear nurse; the very same thought crossed my mind; we will work it out together—

but now tell me; I trust you got a steadier guide on your homeward way."

"I did, and yet the same. A word from the Hermit wrought the change; not the venerable Celestine himself could have guided and protected me better. But my tale is not yet all told," continued Blandina, "nor my errand sped;" and loosing a small key from a ponderous bunch which hung at her side, she unlocked her little casket, and took from thence a circle of beads. "The Hermit Celestine sends you this, my Princess, with his blessing: it is a rosary of the Spiritual Franciscans, and he trusts you will always find on it a bead to drop in time of need. Let me hang it around your neck. It has come at the right moment to replace that which I see you have parted with. These beads, the Hermit bids me tell you, were carved by his own hand."

Bertha bent her head to receive the decoration, saying affectionately,—

"As the Hermit's gift and labour, I must value the rosary—but thou knowest how little I use such helps; methinks they draw the soul from heaven to earth."

"Nay, keep the coronal, and I will instruct you at leisure how to count the beads."

And when at a future time she learnt the secret, Bertha deemed the Hermit's gift the most valuable treasure she possessed. This rosary of the Spiritual Franciscans was, like all other rosaries, composed of large and small beads, usually significant of certain repetitions of particular prayers, mostly of those termed Ave Marias and Paternosters. Such, at least in outward appearance, was the Hermit's. The smaller beads of his coronal were of polished ebony, divided at intervals by acorns of the most minutely carved ivory. By pressing a spring artfully concealed beneath the embossed rim of this exquisite little casket, it opened, and displayed the inestimable gem concealed within—a narrow slip of parchment, on which was illuminated a text of Scripture. Blandina did not make this explanation before Gertruda; indeed, the extreme exhaustion her looks betrayed induced

her to urge both her and the Princess to retire early and gain strength for the proposed morning ramble.

“Thou wilt go with us?”

Blandina pointed to the empty armoires, and spoke of the number of coffers that cumbered the anteroom.

“They can wait till your return to be unpacked.”

“I fear they have waited too long already, especially the huge caravan which was sent off a week ago, and at the bottom of which that careless wench Inna says she packed your Genoa velvet robe—”

“The present of my godmother-aunt, the Duchess of Savoy?” asked Bertha hastily.

“With its beautiful train of silver tissue?” added Gertruda, almost in a breath.

“Too truly,” answered Blandina, almost crying, “and all the costly garniture thereunto belonging. I lay great blame on myself for not having taken greater care of it; particularly as I had before remarked that the trimmings were ruffled as if they had been fingered.”

“Don’t grieve, dear nurse; tiring irons and thy renovating fingers will soon set all to rights. And now good night, my Gertruda. May all good angels watch over your slumbers!” and this affectionate friend mentally added, “and keep you from the machinations of evil men.”

As soon as the Novice had left the room, Bertha confided to her nurse the story of the haunted oratory.

“I see how it is,” said Blandina. “The Abbot and his priests are afraid the pretty bird will like her liberty too well to return willingly to her cage, and therefore still keep their secret hold of her.”

“But how can they, whilst she is under my protection?”

“I said their *secret* hold; what is more binding than the influence of superstitious fear? *Your* protection, dear child! Take care, lest their spells be spun around you, too!”

“But how could they gain admittance into the castle?”

“There are underground ways of access; and these cowled monks would bore through a mountain.”

"Thou art too apprehensive, dear nurse."

"A burnt child dreads the fire. But you, my Principessa, on the contrary, are over-trustful, more particularly of the Lord Abbot."

"Well, I am too sleepy to take his part now. Go to thy rest; thou need'st it, for we have another busy day before us. Call me at sunrise."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PARTY OF PLEASURE.

Awake thee, awake thee, sweet Lady-flower !
The lark has soared to the skies ;
The bee has flown by from her waxen bower,
And calls upon thee to arise.

So sang the Princess Bertha as she entered her friend's apartment on the morrow, at sunrise. Gertruda was already dressed, and at the bottom of the steps they found the ancient Seneschal in dutious waiting. Applying one of his ponderous keys to a side-door, and all his strength to thrust aside the bars, it was thrown open ; and the captives were set free, for the first time, to roam over the wild liberty of nature. Who can realize such a feeling of unrestrained delight ? Is it the prisoner who, after years of captivity and darkness, beholds the light of day ? No ; it falls too glaringly on his aching eye-balls ; and the galling chain has left its painful impress on his cramped and crippled limbs. Is it the sick man when, emancipated from the heavy atmosphere of confinement, he breathes again the outward air ? Even here there is a sense of suffering, a lingering of weakness, a shrinking from the gentlest breeze : but no suffering, past or present, impaired the happiness of our young denizens of an untried world. There was, however, a difference in the manifestation of their delight. Gertruda flew like a bird from its cage hither and thither, giddy with joy. She rushed down the steep declivity from the castle to its girdling forest as if pursued by the fowler ; then returned half-way to meet and chide her lingering companion. Anon, plunging into the bowery retreat, filled her hands and apron with the beautiful flowers that grew profusely around ; until exhausted with delight, and breathless

with the overpowering novelty of freedom, she sank on a mossy bank, and called her friend to come and share her treasures and her enjoyment. The more reflective Bertha had paused even on the threshold, to gaze on the prospect before her; beautiful at all times, but at that hour pre-eminently glorious, flooded as it was by the beams of a newly-risen sun; and, as she slowly wended her way after her fugitive lady-bird, there was not one flower within her ken, one breath of fragrance or tint of beauty—that did not kindle a glow of adoration in her devout spirit.

“Here is a seat for you, my Princess” said Gertruda, rising at her approach; “I will find one at your feet.”

“Nay, ‘princess’ me not, I pray, beneath the greenwood tree! we will feign ourselves two village maidens; and let me hear only the sweet familiar *thou* of our childhood.”

“Methinks I would we were indeed such, and to live always in these woods.”

“But the convent?”

“Ah, indeed, I had forgotten even that amid these beauteous wilds;” and here the novice crossed herself, as if to atone for the inadvertance, adding, “We will return to our shelter when winter has stripped our bowers.”

“Agreed; and come back again to make sweet companionship with the cuckoo and daffodil.”

“And to raise an altar to ‘Our Lady of the Bower,’ call on the lark to join our matins, and teach the nightingale our vesper hymn.”

“ ‘Tis a fair dream, Gertruda, but I fear an idle one,” said Bertha, with a smile that had more of melancholy than mirth. “Methinks the busy children of nature would flout us with our unprofitableness. The bee might ask us why we did not, like her untiring self, extract a healing sweet from every blossom. The lark, as she winged her flight above the earth, might say, ‘My nest may be on the ground, but I seek an altar above the rose-tipped clouds!’ The sun-loving lizard might tarry awhile, belike, to hearken to our petition, but would reply to it, ‘Detain me not; I must away to clear the vine-

yard of its canker-worm, or the toil of the vine-dresser will be in vain.' And even our faithful robin with the crimson breast—"

"Nay, I pray thee mercy," interrupted Gertruda, laughing; "I might as lief go back to Mother Griselda and her homilies, as fix my abode amongst such a set of preachers. Thou hast made out a most edifying myth with thy bees and thy birds but hast forgotten the gayest of all,—the lady butterfly,—who takes her own pastime, and lectures no one for following theirs: what sayest thou, gentle nymph: would it suit thy humour, like hers, to roam all day over beds of flowers?"

"Not one whit. Rural life is my desire, but I should tire of any in which I was not at my appointed work, were it city or wilderness."

"Thou art right, and thou deemest with thy accustomed wisdom, doubtless, that to such as are called thereunto, their appointed work is best performed in a convent?" Bertha answered not, and the questioner continued, "That we should labour night and day, like thy saint-like aunt, to fill our golden phials with the odour of prayer and charity? That we should lay up in store deeds of munificence and self-sacrifice, and bring down intruding wishes and earthly regrets by penance and castigation, as our Lady Abbess teaches."

"And practises," said Bertha with a slight shudder. "But I wish we might ask the Hermit of St. Hilda to solve our doubts: his life is not only a devoted but a busy one. Suppose we consult the Seneschal anent the distance to the cave."

And they both rose to go and meet their guide, who, panting with the exertion of following his erratic charge, had just appeared in sight.

"St. Hilda's Cave, your highness!" exclaimed the breathless serving-man. "As well might you ask me to conduct you to the moon. The distance itself out-measures two stunden, and the road lies through swamps and brakes beset by wolves and reptiles."

"Nay, my good Seneschal, thou measurest distances and multipliest dangers by thy weariness and thy fears. We are

good travellers," said Bertha smiling on her companion; "what sayest thou, Gertruda?"

"For the love of Mary, my gentle lady nun!" cried the old man, "let me conjure you to intercede with her highness against the rash enterprize—at this prime hour, too, when the spirit of the wood is abroad."

"The spirit of the wood—what meanest thou?"

"They say, my lady, that the Emperor Albert—" The old man hesitated, and his lips slightly quivered.

"Go on, good Everard; what of my grandsire?"

"Men say that he is often seen at early morn, bleeding and ghastly, in these woods; and that one, whose name it is treason to utter, rushes by the woodman amid the storms of winter, or is discerned by the light of the charcoal-burner's pile, accompanied by five knights in armour, and hunted by demons that outshriek the blast." The colour had receded from the cheeks of both listeners, and their smiles given way to serious earnestness, as the old man continued his marvellous tale. "I have never—St. Francis forfend!—seen this fearful vision, but I give ye my troth, noble demesels, but yestreen that my dame, whose veracity I can vouch for, as she rode homewards on her little jennet, with a sack of flour which she brought from St. Hilda's mill, heard the most wondrous music, seemingly of a voice, as it were, singing a roundelay with the mountain-stream."

Bertha pretty well guessed from whence it proceeded, but, in further confirmation, asked, "The goatherd's *ranz des vaches*, perchance?"

"Not so, my Princess, unless he were instructed by the cherubims. My wife, who has a pretty taste in music, says nothing could exceed its mellifluous sweetness this side Paradise; even the poor beast willingly stood still to listen."

"Well, be comforted, honest Everard; we will not take the walk to-day. Perchance some time or other thou mayst lend us your pretty *Jenetta* to help us on our way; not that we need fear its length, knowing that rest and refreshment would await us at its end."

“Any time, and all times, my dame and Jannetta, whom your highness has so well christened, will be honoured by your commands; but, if at the present rest and refreshment be your need, I can bespeak you both nearer by—at the dwelling of Dame Hedwig. It is a snug little domicile, garnished by many solid proofs of royal bounty; seeing that the dame and her grandson are especial favourites of our Abbess—and, indeed, I may say of your whole royal house.”

“And they have well deserved it, for it was purchased by costly sacrifices.” Bertha uttered this in a low tone, caught neither by the Seneschal nor Gertruda, who were in busy consultation about the proposed visit. “Oh, let us not,” she exclaimed joyfully, “lose a moment, as we may find Henga, before he hies to his labour with Father Swithin;” and the fair girls bounded, hand in hand, down the steep path indicated by their guide, which led to the outskirts of the forest and the banks of the river. Here, on a verdant but narrow plain, lay a scattered hamlet of rustic buildings, situated between the fringed wood and hyaline stream. One, distinguished above the rest by its superior neatness and accommodation, as well as by the green knoll on which it was situated, attracted their steps towards its wicker gate. Here they remained to gaze, whilst awaiting their lagging attendant, with admiring interest on the pretty enclosure, its well-stocked garden and adjacent meadow plot, doubting not that it belonged to the favoured pair.

“This well-ordered plot, I warrant me, is Henga’s care,” said Gertruda, “and, by the same token, the cow and the goats his grandame’s.”

“See, here she comes with her distaff, to bask in the sun-beams; and who is this youth who hastens from his work to place a seat for her?”

“It is, it *is* Henga!”

“How nimble and upright he is. Love has marvellous powers to quicken the dullest they say, and Henga’s dutiful love for his grandame is well reported of. But it has not only quickened but beautified him. I declare he looks quite

comely, does he not? now he has turned that mass of curls aside, and let us into a little peep within."

Whilst this brief conversation was going on, the Seneschal had overtaken his party, and now proceeded on before to announce to Dame Hedwig the honour that awaited her. The old dame was used to the visits of the House of Hapsburg, and hastened with tottering steps to greet her visitors. Bertha had often seen her before, but since she had listened to the story of her preceptress, and learned how her life, as well as that of her sister and Gertruda also, had been preserved by the faithful services of this poor woman and her departed husband, she felt both respect and gratitude towards her, and more inclined to pay her homage than receive it from her. As Gertruda lifted her veil and embraced poor Hedwig, Bertha knew well why she trembled with emotion; and as she herself pressed the old woman's withered hand, she remembered how often it had fed, supported, and toiled for the children of her unfortunate master. But, the first emotion of the meeting over, its honour and pleasure remained; and Hedwig did the honours of hospitality with genuine delight, by first conducting her admiring guests into every corner of her little domicile, and then inviting them to a turn in the garden. In the meanwhile, Henga had gathered his fruits and delivered them into the hand of the little serving-girl to arrange, with the delicacies of the dairy—her eggs and oaten cakes—for the refection of their august visitors, in the gallery of the cottage. This was performed so adroitly as to call forth the warmest commendations, and the best honour that can be paid to a feast—a hearty participation of it. But the chief contributor to its dainties was not there to do its honours; and the guests failed not to lament his absence.

"My dear ladies," said the dame, "as soon could you coax the fleet hart from his covert as my shy boy. I marvel he had not fled before your approach, as he was forewarned of your visit."

"Our visit?" repeated the Princess, looking at Gertruda, "Why, we knew it not ourselves an hour ago!"

“Nathless, Henga informed me last eve, in his fanciful guise, that two birds of bright feather and sweet throat would light on our eaves this morn. Nay, he further foretold that a noble hawk would take cover beneath our thatch.”

“This last should be the Seneschal.”

Perhaps the grandame observed the smile which played round Bertha’s mouth, for she added, with great solemnity,—

“Ah, my Princess, *He* is just who holds the balance, and what His Providence withholds with one hand He deals out with the other. My Henga has rare gifts, and rarer virtues.”

The onerous duties of hospitality in those days prevented much conversation, or Hedwig would have expatiated more fully on her favourite theme. The repast, however, needed little urging, and, as has been said, was done ample justice to by all. But the moment of prime enjoyment succeeded, when the guests were at leisure to enjoy the lovely landscape around; to inhale the breath of flowers, and to listen to the rushing of the river. Indeed, such to them was the fairy novelty of the scene that it seemed but in natural unison with it, and therefore to create little surprise, when the same soft pipe was heard in the bower below as had enchanted them in the convent-garden. The wild preluding, the sweet piping air, held the listeners mute and almost breathless; but ere they could address a question concerning the unseen musician to their hostess, a loud rap at the door beneath called her away and silenced the minstrel. It was the Archduke Frederick, who, intending a visit to Dame Hedwig, was pleasantly surprised at finding his daughter already an occupant of her dwelling. He therefore dismissed the Seneschal, undertaking his office of guide, and in his turn partook of Dame Hedwig’s dainties, lingered another hour in social intercourse, and, after promising to repeat the much-enjoyed visit, the trio set off on their homeward road. The walk was delightful. At first the shy novice lingered behind, but Frederick soon lured her to his side. He had known and greatly esteemed her aunt and mother, and he thought with regret that one so loved by his own Bertha, and so worthy

of her love, should be separated from her. It pleased him to see the happiness of these sweet young maidens amid scenes so redolent of his own happy early days: to breathe with them the free air of heaven, and to take sweet counsel with her he best loved. So he gave himself up to the charm of the moment, and sternly bade the past and future "avaunt!" The Archduke pointed out to his delighted listeners every feature in the glorious creation around, linked with some remembrance of boyish sports. He named each mountain, tree, and even bird, and took great interest in drawing out the poor shrinking novice. As the two young friends stood together to take a farewell glance at the view, Frederick watched them for some moments, and then taking Gertruda's hand, he said,—

" You resemble, my child, both your mother and aunt, for you have stolen a look of each; but"—and he turned to his daughter—" there is a trick in thy friend's countenance, Bertha, which haunts me by its resemblance—it can't be to thyself?"

" And why not? Our quaint old gardener calls us 'twin doves of Venus's car.'"

" *St. Venus* thou meanest," said the Archduke, laughing heartily. " The good father ever made sad havoc amid saints and goddesses. I remember our wiser brother Albert, who was the only scholar amongst us, often tried to set him right; but honest Swithin could never be brought to see the difference between the saints of modern Rome and their pagan ancestors; and their controversies were a never-failing source of fun to us ignoramuses, who cared little for either. Bertha, mind, when I visit the Abbey, I ask for my friend Swithin."

When they reached the Castle, Frederick turned round to take a farewell view.

" What a morning of pure delight has been vouchsafed to me!" he said.

Then, taking a hand each of Bertha and Gertruda, he joined them together, and pressed his lips on them, adding,—

"Oh, my children, cultivate simple pleasures, and take the testimony of one who has found the emptiness of all other."

Frederick was right. In truth, Pleasure is a coquettish and somewhat ungrateful deity, turning her back on those who sacrifice most and oftenest at her shrine; whilst she gives a nod and a smile to the wayworn pilgrim as she seasons his dry crust with an unexpected draught from her sparkling spring, presented by the hand of Christian love. Then, though often urging her votaries to make such, she hates great preparations and long invitations, and often flies from such to join a band of children at play, or a family picnic on the greensward. Nay, such are her strange vagaries, that she is known sometimes to hover over the sick, to cheer the weary, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, teach the ignorant, and visit the captive.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOST VEST.

I cannot guess where it has flown,
I've sought it far and near—
Unless the *little people* have
Stolen my lady's gear.

The first sounds that greeted the wanderers' return were sadly at variance with the spirit of their early ramble. Voices raised in altercation were heard as they passed through the antechamber, betraying a serious disagreement between the two attendants of the Princess; and the interrogated Blandina, after many expressions of surprise, indignation, and regret, unfolded the astounding intelligence that the vest of green Genoa velvet, its corresponding train of silver taffeta, together with countless knots of ribbons and other garniture thereunto belonging, had disappeared, and could nowhere be heard of. On adjourning to the tiring-room, a strange confusion presented itself, every chair and table being covered with the contents of the well-rummaged presses. At her lady's approach, Inna raised her head from the depths of a huge chest in which she professed to be seeking the missing treasure. Her cheeks were somewhat suffused, but their heightened colour might be attributable to the vehemence with which she called on all the saints to witness the skill and precision she had displayed in packing and padlocking.

"Silence, maiden," said the Princess with unwonted severity. "Innocence requires not such noisy vindication. Restore order to my scattered wardrobe, whilst Dame Blandina and I consult how to repair the loss of its best ornament, and in what manner to institute a search for it. Tell me, my good nurse," addressing the latter, "what dost thou counsel?"

“Alas! madam,” replied Blandina, “I scarcely know what to propose; I will, with your sanction, go myself and seek through our apartments at the convent, lest haply it might be left behind; yet that is not likely.”

“Certainly not; for it could not be hid in a corner.”

“Then I know not what I can propose for the Fraulein. It would have been as well, as the Lady Abbess has insisted on her wearing a secular dress, that she had provided her with one.”

“You forget.”

“No, I do not; but I shall never be able to make one whole garment out of the leavings of the moths and mice which she entrusted to me. You, my Princess, will need the damask tunic and flowered mantua, as well as the striped silk of Tuscany; but I hear a knock at the door of the anteroom;” and Blandina hastened from the corner in which this little conference had taken place to open it, and announce the two young princesses, Alice and Aletta.

“Why, here is a gallimawfry, sweet my coz,” exclaimed the former. “Art thou setting up thy old garments to a bidding, ere thou gettest thyself measured for the new.”

“Our cousin Bertha does well to displace the dull feathers of the hawk before she assumes the graceful plume of Bohemia,” observed her sister.

“That triple plume has a device which falls not in with my humour,” retorted Alice; “and if our coz will be advised by me, she will decline to don it.”

“Go on, my lively kinswoman,” said Bertha, stooping to embrace the banterers. “Yet those are deemed but unskilful archers who choose a near mark and a low aim.”

“Well, then, we will sound a truce,” said Alice; “our purpose was to parley, not to skirmish; we came to crave thy counsel in the arrangement of our wardrobe, little foreboding to see thine own in such admired disorder.”

The mysterious disappearance of the magnificent vest was now disclosed; the joke and gibe were exchanged for sincere sympathy; and many conjectures were hazarded respecting its

probable destiny, by all but the owner and her "mistress of the robes," who probably had their own opinion on the matter and their own reasons for keeping it to themselves. Alice conjectured that their formidable aunt had ordered it to be kept back, as a practical lesson on mundane vanities, and Aletta had the temerity to hint at her converting it into an altar-cloth.

Poor Gertruda's distress at such a monstrous conclusion was fortunately relieved, and the number of wonderers and commiserators augmented, by the arrival of the Baroness von Hompe, one of the Archduchess's ladies, and appointed by her to the somewhat equivocal office of temporary governante of her two youthful visitors. This portly dame entered with profound interest into Inna's elaborate account of the packing and padlocking of the vanished dress, declaring "that, if it were not more to the credit of St. Klare to create new garments than to steal old ones, she could almost imagine the blessed saint had taken it in her own behoof;" a hint which Inna was not slow to improve, observing, "that doubtless such holy personages provided for their own wants in the way best suited to their own convenience."

"And in this special case," retorted Blandina significantly, "it must be granted with little consideration for ours, since my Lady Abbess having ordered the novice Gertruda to assume the secular habit with such appliances thereunto, my Princess had destined her newest and best for her especial service, nothing doubtful in its suitableness, since the young demosels are so alike in height and size."

"Why do ye not lay your strait before my Lady?" suggested the Baroness von Hompe. "We all know that her highness the Archduchess has a vast store of the rich and rare; and that she will grudge nothing in her fair favourite's behoof I give ye my pledge." This hint was received with universal approbation. Away flew the young Princesses to urge their suit, and after them waddled the fat lady-in-waiting, to back it with her opportune remarks on the dangerous inroads of moths and damps, and the consequent benefit of occasional airings. We shall not attempt to describe the wimples and

fardingales—the tunics, vests, crosses, and jewels, which, although laid by in disuse from the mournful state of the court, were now opened freely to supply the exigencies of the Church, and to aid in doing honour to the return of the beloved Prince.

The hoards of the Archduchess in the article of raiment betrayed a bump of acquisitiveness that might hereafter afford a guide to the identification of her skull amongst the disinterred craniums of Kœnigsfelden Abbey. Not only did the royal presses teem with the richer vestments of her wedded life, but there were to be found therein girlish costumes of her native south—dresses worn in earlier days at rural fêtes and masks, the prevailing pastime of that period. It required the combined aid of the whole body of tirewomen to convey with due decorum the rich freight to Bertha's room; the young ladies preceding, and the Baroness panting after, as she stooped, ever and anon, to collect some of the scattered finery. This was a red-letter day in her monotonous life; nor was the opening of the long-sealed stores less exhilarating to the youthful group.

Whilst Bertha superintended Blandina's skilful adaptation of some of the really excellent materials to their destined wearer, the Princesses seized on the unappropriated finery; one of them peeping, with laughing eyes, through a curtained mask, or shrouding her graceful form in the folds of a mantilla; whilst her sister swept along with assumed dignity in robes of stiff brocade. Nor was it a less effective transformation when the portly form of the Baroness von Hompe emerged from a recess, compressed within the laced boddice and short petticoat of a Swiss shepherdess. It was, in truth, a merry mask. The ringing laugh of the sportive sisters, bursting afresh at each renewed admonition of the travestie governante; the naïve curiosity and wonder of the novice; the self-importance of the tirewomen, set off by the indulgent sweetness of the contemplative Princess—and all in their various ways indicative of happiness. At the height of their merriment a page entered to announce the arrival of Father Swithin; and, at the earnest request of the young party, the

lady-in-waiting permitted his entrance. If the first sight of the motley group caused the good friar a backward step, his ready wit turned it to account by declaring, "his was the natural trepidation of a mortal on approaching the assembled goddesses."

"Verily, my Princess," he continued, "I can compare your radiant company, with your royal self at its head, to naught but the goddess Ursula and her virgin harpies, flying from the Picts and satyrs. *Ora pro nobis!*" ejaculated the convicted classic, "I pray I be not confounding the immaculate maidens, eleven thousand in number, with that heathen crew whom Satan, out of sheer malice to me and the saints, has so mingled up in my unlucky brain that I hardly know them from their betters. Nathless, I defy them, with all their lying legions, to outdo the miracles and metamorphoses detailed in the true and edifying history of the canonized saints, monks, and hermits, nuns, and princesses of our holy Mother Church."

The young ladies reverently assented; the abigails crossed themselves; whilst the Baroness declared "that the father's discourse was as edifying as the mass-book."

Father Swithin now craved permission to present his offering; but, as he laid his blooming nosegay before the princesses and Gertruda, remembering his late failure in classical illustration, he only ventured on a simple comparison between their beauty and fragrance and the fair lady-flowers to whom he presented them; taking leave, in his own picturesque manner—for his whole nature was a genuine gush of tenderness, poetry, and devotion—with the affectionate prayer, "that when their earthly bloom was past, they might flower as fadeless immortelles in the weedless gardens of Paradise."

After the above exciting incidents a week passed in strict family intercourse, chiefly between the ladies of the Castle; the royal brothers being often absent during the day on important business in the neighbourhood, and entertaining large parties at night, at which they were not judged suitable guests. Much preparation was going on at the same time within and without the Castle: that occupying the elder

inmates, left the young party to enjoy their rides and rambles, their needlework, and social chat; unless, indeed, when they were called on to take their part in the more important consultations of the tiring-room, which had unfortunately lost its most efficient workwoman by the sudden and, it was feared, infectious illness of Inna, which had necessitated her removal to a distant part of the Castle in the vicinity of the housekeeper's apartments. The Baroness von Hompe was, to the ill-concealed satisfaction of her charge, often called off to hold conferences with the Lord Chamberlain on intricate questions of German etiquette; and these unexplained conferences and appointments so awakened the curiosity of the twin Princesses that they determined, if it were possible, to find out the place in which they were held and—who knows?—but the wicked suspicion was only expressed by sagacious nods of the head—convict the rigid duenna of some little departure from her own code of propriety. After much diligent search the object of it was found, together with the Chamberlain, in the great hall, busily employed with that venerable functionary in marshaling old Everard and his troop of serving-men, who had grown somewhat rusty from want of practice. Their wheelings and counter-wheelings—the Baroness occasionally acting as fugleman, or rather woman—were no less diverting than the labours of the wheezing Chamberlain, who, furnished with a long list of interminable titles and quarterings of the expected guests, rehearsed his part of Master of the Ceremonies with martyr-like patience and perseverance. The sisters had discovered a private entrance into the musicians' gallery above, and kept up a running accompaniment between it and the ladies' bower. It was impossible to withstand their sunny mirth and droll representations. Gertruda was soon enlisted as a sharer of their stealthy peeps, and even the grave Archduchess was half coaxed, half dragged to the door, though scared by her fears and her propriety from entering within it.

Bertha beheld with delightful surprise the marvellous change which light and liberty had wrought on the fragile

flower of the cloister: her quickened step, her upright gait, her heightened bloom, the laughing light of her eyes, and the sweet smile for ever struggling to her lips, from the heart's deep content. Alice declared she saw the rose opening hour by hour on her cheeks; and Aletta that she laughed so loud as threatened to betray them to the performers in the hall. But, while expanding in the sunshine, did no chill from the cloister creep through her veins? No one knew. Gertruda never named Koenigsfelden, and Bertha requested it might never be spoken of in her hearing. She had also taken care that the door leading to the oratory should be locked, and the key be placed in Blandina's keeping, and Gertruda had neither asked for it nor made any allusion to the mysterious image. She might be likened to the Princess in the fairy tale, who was transplanted into a fairy region which she knew was not her own, but which she was permitted to enjoy for a season, on the penalty of its vanishing at the first word of her former state of being. To the other emancipated captive, who had looked to the busy world as her future home and scene of action, it had worn no air of fairy-land, but one of anxious cares and stern realities. She could not—she willed not—to close her eyes on that which was passing around her, nor forbear to read in her father's pensive smile, on her uncle Albert's thoughtful brow, and yet more on Leopold's flushed cheeks, that peace dwelt not within. Blandina, who went daily to the housekeeper's room to inquire for her patient the sick tirewoman, brought back intelligence of nocturnal meetings and noisy wranglings amongst the nobles at the banquets which were held both at the Castle of Hapsburg and those of the neighbouring chieftains. Neither was the intelligence brought of Inna likely to allay the anxiety felt both by the Princess and Blandina on her account; and her state was the more unaccountable, as the excellent doctor who had been summoned at first by the housekeeper had pronounced her disorder to be slight—the effect of a cold and over-excitement, and it had in fact easily yielded to his remedies. A relapse had occurred which neither the leech nor housekeeper could

account for. In the peopled state of the castle, the latter was obliged to delegate her office of nurse to one recommended by Father Anselmo, the confessor of the novices, who came often to visit the sick girl; and though he did not absolutely forbid the attendance of the leech, yet his orders were too often contradicted and his remedies set aside. Bertha felt it impossible to let the matter rest here, and she and her chief councillor, Blandina, determined that they must endeavour all in their power to speak to the leech, as well as to bespeak the interest of the Archduke. To effect this, Blandina should learn from the housekeeper the usual hour of Doctor Baumgarten's visit, and endeavour to meet him in her room; and, if further interference or assistance were required, Bertha well knew she should readily find it from her indulgent parent.

Such was the state of affairs in the Castle of Hapsburg after the first week of the family reunion; but the circle was soon to be enlarged from without, and the rehearsals converted into actual performances.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PASS OF ST. GOTTHARD.

Think'st thou to gull me by that mean disguise ?
Noblesse oblige, conceal it as thou wilt.

NEARLY five centuries before the Imperial Road-maker had thrown his girdle round the Alps, and demanded a free passage from the Frozen Giants, a party of travellers prepared to leave Bellinzona, a town on the Italian side of Mont St. Gothard, and cross the mountain-pass on foot. They were without attendants save their guides, and, from the various callings which their dress indicated—one being habited as a wandering minstrel or Minnesinger, another bearing a pedlar's pack, and a third the pilgrim's staff—it might appear as though their meeting had been by chance, such associations not being at all rare in those days, when the wild passes of the Alps were invaded by bandit hordes, and constantly traversed by scarcely less lawless bands of mercenaries in the pay of sovereigns whose rapacity and ambition kept them in constant action. Whether the liberality with which his guests had discharged their account with mine host of the Aquila d'Oro had raised some doubts as to their identity with their presumed humble callings, or the natural regret of the landlord at losing such customers, is not quite evident; but he remained at the door of his inn watching their progress, together with a remarkably distinguished-looking Swiss mountaineer, until the party were out of sight. Soon after, the latter, taking friendly leave of mine host, also ascended the mountain, but by another and shorter path than that taken by the motley group already described. Our travellers seemed largely to partake of the hilarity inspired by mountain air, and to be little under the influence of apprehension or prudence. They

roused the echoes by their cheerful voices, now uniting in a hunters' chorus, anon hailing their companions from the top of an impending rock or the depth of a cavern as following their several humours, they left the beaten path to find one trodden only

“By the wild flock that never knew a fold.”

The Pilgrim alone, with a gravity becoming his calling, continued his route by the side of his guides steadily, but not silently; for he encouraged them to converse freely by asking them pertinent questions respecting the country through which they passed, the manners and customs of the people, and even their own individual history, enlivening his discourse with such playful sallies as are generally well received from the lips of the traveller. Thus discoursing, the party had got considerably in advance of their more erratic companions, when, warned by the guides of the danger of lingering on the mountain, and failing to get an answer to their repeated calls, the Pilgrim sent the guides back in different directions to collect the stragglers, proposing to walk on to the entrance of a forest which crowned the next ascent. Here, when reached, he stretched himself on the moss-cushioned root of a fragrant pine, and, lulled by wind and waterfall, he first fell into a dreamy reverie, and then into a summer-day sleep, that most delicious of slumbers. A shrill cry first broke the spell, and this, followed by the whizzing of an arrow through the air and the fall of a dark body which threw a shadow on the path, completely roused him. At the same moment, the Swiss mountaineer, whom we have already noticed at the door of the Aquila d'Oro, sprang from the thicket, and approached a large eagle, which, transfixed by the archer's dart, had in falling released a kid that he had carried off in his beak. The little creature, unharmed though stunned, was taken in the arms of the hunter to its mother, who had rushed down the rock, and was stamping and butting at the dying eagle. Powerful even in its death-pangs, the mighty denizen of the rock was tearing up the moss with its flapping wings, and burying its ponderous body in the earth, until its

sun-piercing eye became dim, its struggles relaxed, and it fell lifeless on its side. The traveller, who had been watching this hunting episode with much interest, now approached the archer, on whose countenance he read more of sympathy than triumph as he bent over the spoil of his bow.

"You have a noble quarry here, hunter," said he; "but methinks it is almost a pity to destroy such a befitting monarch of these wilds."

"I did it not for sport, Sir Pilgrim," answered the hunter, and, as he spoke, he rose to his full height, and looked at the speaker, who, in his turn, regarded him with admiration. The archer was in the prime of manhood; his countenance handsome and open; his form at once athletic and flexible. A few, a very few, grey hairs mingled with the sunny brown of his closely curling locks, whilst those locks retreating from his forehead revealed a few lines impressed by thought or care across it. "It was no pastime to me," he continued, "to stop his lofty flight; but I had no other means of releasing the captive in his beak."

"A prisoner scarcely worth the life of its noble captor."

"It is thus you may reckon, Sir Pilgrim," said the archer indignantly; "but, in my poor judgment, there is no victim of tyranny, however insignificant, that is not worth ransoming at any sacrifice."

"Nay, I crave your pardon. I meant not to disparage your motives. Your skill is beyond all challenge. I marvel, though, that, in aiming at the eagle, you did not fear to hit the little trembler in his beak."

"I am schooled in passes of that kind," said the Swiss, in a voice that had lost its tone of defiance. "God grant you may never be called to take lessons therein!"

There was something in the calm dignity of this reply, still more the sudden revelation it conveyed of the identity of the speaker, that silenced further interrogatory. To change the subject, the Pilgrim pointed to the arrow that still transfixed the dead eagle, remarking it had "gone straight through the heart."

"Pull it out, if it so please ye," said the archer, "and read me the posey."

"The Avenger!" the characters are cunningly carved, and the arrow is of the toughest; but I do not relish the motto: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.'

The Swiss fixed his eyes intently on his companion. "Whence drew you that solemn saw?" And then, as if impatient of the subject, abruptly asked, "Why find I you alone on the mountain. Surely erewhile you left Bellinzona in company?"

"I did, and well I now remember you watched with mine host our departure from the court of his hostelry."

"He might well do his best to show due honour—ay, and to protect from roguery—guests of such courteous speech and liberal hand. Moreover, mine host of the Aquila d'Oro is a lover of the gentle science, and was enwrapt by the minstrel's melody, and says he calls to mind the romaut of Blondel, the noble Minnesinger, who delivered him of the Lion-heart from the vile dungeon in which his false allies had chained him."

"And what was your comment thereon?"

"A hearty wish that mine host's lauded minstrel might prove as faithful to his—"

"King?"

"I leave you, Sir Pilgrim, to fill the blank with what title you list. Your Blondel gives but little promise of fidelity in leaving you thus alone. But gibe apart, if you have missed your way and your company, and will accept of my poor services, I will help you to find both."

The traveller explained his position, and his desire to reach the foot of the mountain ere nightfall.

"That you will scarcely do, unless you borrow the wings of my poor eagle," said the Swiss Bowman, smiling. "But if we can succeed in quickening the steps of your fellow-travellers, you may arrive at the summit of the mountain, and get a night's lodging, and supper to boot, at the Hospice, where the good Prior is ever ready to welcome the weary,

asking naught in return but tidings from the plains below, and how that world wags which he believes he renounced long ago."

"Your counsel is good. I see the laggards just emerging from the forest yonder; they answer our signals, and come on more briskly. An't please ye, bold hunter, we will pursue our journey, and leave them to follow. On what do you look so keenly, hunter? See you another eagle on the wing?"

"Perchance a vulture hovering round its prey. I surely counted three guides, and you departed with two."

"The third overtook us at about a furlong's distance from Bellinzona. By my staff and cockle-shell! I see now through the plot. The fellow said he was sent as an after-precaution of the landlord, lest—but I forgot the rest of his lying inventions."

"The scoundrel has more effrontery than I could have credited him for, seeing that his services were flatly refused by the landlord. But, fear not, Sir Pilgrim, your other guides are trustworthy, and I will keep an eye on the scapegrace. By the way, had he a companion?"

"Now you ask me, I think he was accompanied by a Franciscan friar, who walked onwards without any salutation. I scarcely noticed him, and he was soon out of sight."

There was nothing more said for some minutes, when the Pilgrim, whose interest in his companion became more and more lively, forgot the intrusive guide, and with some address led back the conversation to the subject formerly touched on, by observing,—

"After the example you have shown me of your skill, hunter, I shall moderate my marvel at the wonders we hear on our side of the mountains of your Swiss prowess in battle."

"You may, perchance, never have felt the foreign tyrant's gripe, and know not, therefore, what force there is in a free man's struggles. The waters of our lake when calm reflect the blue of heaven, but we wist not of their depth and strength till strong winds lash them into fury. Even the dove will defend her young against the hawk."

"I understand your parable, and grant the hawk to be a suitable device for your oppressors—even the talons of the great Rudolph were sharp when his will was crossed; but that will was generally tempered with generosity, and oftentimes restrained by justice. He was a giant in an age of pygmies, and ruled, as a wise father governs his children, because he was superior to all in wisdom and experience. But he was long before our time, friend," continued the Pilgrim, recollecting that he had been thinking aloud rather than addressing his companion; "though we can both recollect the murder of his son, the Emperor Albert."

"My country was clear of that deed—a foul one, but still more foully avenged."

"Did I not say, even now, that man is a blind avenger? But surely fame has outrun truth in the dark stories it tells of the cruelties of the Queen of Hungary and her brother Leopold. Could woman's nature become so hardened as to revel in deeds of blood?"

"Stranger," replied the Swiss solemnly, "that history, though deeply engraven on every heart, has been forbidden to find its way to the lips: let us drop the subject."

"Answer me but this. Has no trace of the unfortunate and guilty John of Swabia been discovered?"

"And if there had, it would peril my head to own any cognizance of it. Let it be repeated, to the credit of my people, that, though ground to the earth by Albert, they refused to shelter his murderers. Had they known how his death would have been avenged, and the true history of the wrongs that provoked it, they might not, perhaps, have dealt such hard justice to his—But we will leave them to One whomingles mercy in His sternest awards."

The travellers now walked on for some time in silence, which the Pilgrim broke by referring to the recent battle of Morgarten, which has been termed the "Swiss Marathon." He did not, indeed, make any allusion to classic antiquity when he asked his companion if he had been in the fight,

but in the benevolent hope of raising his spirits, which their last subject had evidently depressed.

“I was on the heights” he replied, his eye kindling, “above that narrow ledge, between the heights of Morgarten and the lake below. It was on the 6th of November,* yet there was just such a sun in the heavens as now rides over our heads and gleams on the snow. It shone brighter yet on the lake bordered by the narrow way over which the invaders had to pass. It was, in sooth, a noble sight; the whole army of Austrian chivalry, headed by the fiery Leopold, dwarfish, it is true, in stature, but with a spirit that swells him to the bulk of a giant. Although twenty thousand strong, the narrow footway admitted but a single horseman.”

“Twenty thousand!” repeated the listener, who drank in eagerly the words of the narrator. “How were the Schwyzers prepared for such an encounter?”

“Four hundred of the best bowmen of Uri, and three hundred of chosen lancers from Unterwalden, had come to their assistance, and swelled their numbers to thirteen hundred.”

“A fearful odds! A handful of peasants, against the trained bands of Austria.”

“As men deem,” resumed the narrator. “But they had Right for their watchword, the mountains and lakes for their guardians, and the counsel of the experienced for their direction. On the eve of the attack, the thirteen hundred warriors stood bareheaded to listen to the advice of their elders. Randolph Reding of Bilbereck had caused himself to be borne on his sick couch and placed in their midst. He held an arrow in his feeble hand, and thus addressed them: ‘My sons, the Lord has sent us this winged messenger from the hand of a foe, who has taken pity on our state. It was shot yesterday into our outposts; read the inscription, “Beware of Morgarten!” I do not hesitate to counsel you to follow the warning it gives, as I know full well the hand from

* The whole of this account is historical.

whence it comes; whose but the noble Henry of Hunenberg's, who scorned to attack a handful of unprepared victims with the congregated force of Austria? Range yourselves by break of day on the heights of Satel, and there, after imploring assistance from the Lord of Hosts, calmly and confidently await the issue. Fear not, my beloved Schwytzers,' continued the aged man, as sudden strength shot through his frame, enabling him to raise himself on his couch, 'the eyes of the ancient, though dim to outward objects, are sometimes permitted to pierce into the hidden. Ere the set of to-morrow's sun your foe will be in your power; use your triumph as Christian men and as loyal Schwytzers.' A low murmur of respectful accord ran through the host; and, as they were about to bear the respected Elder to his home, a band of fifty Schwytzers entered the square. These were some harebrained youths who had been led into insubordination by their hot blood, and had been banished from their country. In her hour of peril they returned to offer their lives in her defence: but the stern virtue of their countrymen refused to receive them into their ranks. Generous and patriotic, they still determined to merit a recall to their country or perish with her. I offered them my co-operation, being well acquainted with every cleft of the mountain. We spent the night in collecting large rocks and felling trees; and at day-break we stood with our ammunition heaped around us, and joined our supplications with those of the army on the Satel for a blessing on our arms."

"Your bow, I doubt not, did quick execution on that hot day?" interrupted the Pilgrim.

"I crave pardon; it lay unstrung, for we worked with heavier arms. Large stones, trunks and roots of trees, even detached rocks, were hurled from our hands on the invaders as they defiled in gallant trim below, crushing both horse and rider, or hurling them into the lake. The unexpected attack maddened the furious animals, and scarcely less astounded masters; so that a scene of the most terrible confusion took place, of which the Schwytzers planted on the Satel took advantage. Rushing down the slope, they attacked the enemy's flank, struck down

the heavy armed knights with their clubs, and attacked them with halberd and two-handed sword ; thus finishing the destruction which the artillery of the mountain had begun. The victory was complete : in one hour and a half none remained of that haughty host but the flying and the slain. Leopold was saved with difficulty, but his chivalry was trodden in the dust."

"Did not the Vogt Landenburg fall on that day ? and, if I mistake not, his brother, the tyrant of Küsnacht ?" asked the Pilgrim ; but a moment's recollection and the saddened expression of the hunter's countenance made him repent his curiosity.

"He fell not in fight," answered the Archer in a voice of deep emotion. "Yet he deserved his fate. You say well that man is a blind *avenger* ; yet, may he not be a chosen *instrument* in the hand of the Great Awarder to punish the oppressor and the blood-thirsty ?" The question remained unanswered, for a sudden change of weather drew attention to the danger of their situation. "Did you hear that ?" exclaimed the Bowman, as a rumbling like the discharge of artillery resounded amongst the mountains. "It is the fall of an avalanche yonder. See, see ! it rolls down the slope of the rock—and there is another. Why do your party linger ? there's a snow-storm towards." Almost as these words of warning were uttered, the sun became darkened, light walls of snow were lifted from the tops of the mountains and fell back in feathery wreaths, beautiful in spite of their omen of storm. A low wail, musical and plaintive, was heard from the tops of the pines, whilst sudden gusts strewed the paths with falling leaves and tender shoots.

"We must endeavour to reach the Hospice ere the storm breaks," said the Swiss, "or evil may betide." And again he blew a loud blast of his horn to quicken the lagging party. Before they were all assembled

"Iron sleet of arrowy shower"

had begun to fall, and soon close-clustering flakes of snow blocked up the path and, congealing as it fell, rendered it so

slippery and uncertain that the travellers were in danger at every step of exchanging it for some unseen gulf, or losing each other amid the darkness. Moreover, the driving snow took away their breath, its icy touch benumbed their limbs and impeded their movements. The guides, and more especially the Bowman, gave all their help of long experience to their companions, who in all else were in no whit behind the requisitions of that perilous hour.

At length the friendly light of the Hospice was discerned glimmering on the snow, and, cold, famishing and exhausted, never was baronial hall, or summer bower, half so welcome to the bidden guest as the ice-encrusted walls of the rude monastery of St. Gothard to our weather-beaten travellers !

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOSPICE.

What though frost
Reign everlasting—there's that within
Which where it comes makes summer.

“**BENEDICITE!**” said the porter, as he opened the door of the convent, sheltering himself behind its massive screen from the sharp blast which forced in the snow-shower, and almost choked the entrance. “Come in, and welcome! But where, in the name of all calendared saints, did ye linger in such a night as this?”

He led the way through several vaulted passages to the foot of some stone stairs, and thence to a higher story, and, throwing open a wide door, introduced the almost blinded and frozen travellers into the light and warmth of the convent refectory. A large fire of blazing pine-logs reached half across the large apartment, around which were gathered a number of men, who, having satisfied their hunger at the well-covered table reaching through the whole length of the middle of the chamber, had retired, taking with them their flasks and goblets to drain them further round the cheerful fire. The Prior, a fine hale old man with an aspect full of benevolent hilarity, rose courteously from his snug seat in the warmest corner of the spacious chimney at the entrance of the strangers, “regretting they had not arrived earlier to partake of a better supper than he feared he could now place before them.”

“But put on the best ye have, brother Cellarer,” he continued, addressing one of the friars in attendance. “The end of a feast is better than the beginning of a fray, as the old saw assures us, and, moreover, that hunger needs no sauce.”

“Nor does good wine need a bush, reverend father, to draw in my turn on the wisdom of ages,” answered the Pilgrim,

bowing courteously as he first drank of the warm cordial prepared for them, and passed the cup to his friends. "This is the elixir vitae; already it tingles at my fingers' ends; it would bring the dead alive!"

The upper part of the table was quickly respread with viands that less hungry participants might have relished—such as deer and chamois flesh, partridges and heathcocks, goat's-milk cheese and other dairy dainties. Of these our half-famished wayfarers having partaken at their pleasure, room was made for them to join the fireside circle. As he took the seat offered him next the Prior, the Pilgrim looked round on the countenances illuminated by the blaze of the pine-logs, in the hope of discovering that of his late companion, the Swiss Bowman; but his search was vain. Neither was its absence compensated for by any of those which met his eye. The greater number of the company were brothers of the monastery, whose round and rubicund faces were here and there contrasted by the moustached lips and bronzed visages of some swaggering freebooters, and the haggard eye and travel-bent form of a few pilgrims, of whom many were crossing the mountain, to attend the approaching festival of "Our Lady of Einsiedlen." In his careful investigation, the inquirer's eye rested with a strange yet unwilling fascination on a figure of large dimensions wrapped in the cloak of a Mendicant Friar, the cowl of which was so closely drawn over the face as to conceal all the features save a pair of large, round, and very prominent eyes, that almost gave an appearance of strangulation, as they rested with a cold meaningless stare on all who looked towards them—just as, by a secret of the painter's art, the eye of some portraits seems to follow you whithersoever you turn. To the Pilgrim's fancy those grey starting orbs of the Franciscan friar fell on him like a blighting mildew, and even chilled the hilarity of the Prior's jokes, his blazing faggots, and hospitable cheer. When the party were again settled, and the widened circle closed, the cheerful superior proceeded to demand what he termed his *toll*, and to ask his guests for news from Italy.

"Few travellers have passed over our altitudes of late," he said. "And though we do live so much *above* the world, we still take a little interest in its concerns." And here his fat cough, even more irresistible than his wit, communicated its influence to the whole circle, taking its round with the wine-cup; widening every mouth, and illuminating every eye except those of the Friar, which looked coldly on, and checked the answering joke on the Pilgrim's lips.

"However," continued the Prior, "it raineth not unless it poureth, and this day we have collected a goodly company from all parts."

"For which, reverend father," observed the Sub-prior, "we have to render gratulations, first to our blessed Lady of the Eremites, and next to the return of the Archduke Frederick."

"Ay, tell us, sir Pilgrim," eagerly interupted the Prior, "if this wondrous bruit be true which these gallant militaires have brought us. Has Duke Frederick in verity escaped from captivity?"

"Truly, reverend father, I concern myself little about the affairs of my betters; but it was noised throughout all Lombardy that Louis of Bavaria had opened the prison-door of his captive, Frederick of Hapsburg, and that the Archduke had returned to his brethren."

"Thus much we have already gathered from our other guests; but canst not thou, my son, being more recently arrived, throw some glimmer of light on the cause of this unlooked-for clemency? Louis is not wont to give up his prisoners without a ransom."

"Some affirm that he has withdrawn the bolt in order to levy such. But I pray your excuse for my dullness," continued the Pilgrim rather impatiently, "when I confess I give but little heed to the tongue of rumour."

"There are, however, two gallants of your party," said the baffled yet not disconcerted inquirer, "who, I warrant, have not the same indifference to what passes in courts and bowers, since, certes, they must be welcome visitants in both."

In saying this, all eyes, as well as his own, were turned on the two young companions of the Pilgrim, who were in form and feature such, as all unacquainted with the dull realities of princely courts and ladies' bowers delight to people those penetralia withal. They were both in the summer of their years, nearly of an age, though in appearance the taller, darker, and more martial bearer of the pedlar's pack looked a few years older than the almost boy-like minstrel; yet both were lithe of limb and handsome of countenance. The Pedlar, for such he assumed to be, was of freer speech and bolder deportment than his companion; yet there was a *bo-peep* about his laughing eyes, and an arch smile occasionally curling his upper lip that checked such confidence as his more modest friend inspired: for who could look into the mirror of *his* dark blue eye and not *feel*, even when there was not penetration to discern, that the young Minstrel possessed a gifted genius and a sensitive heart. The callings of the two friends were rightly assumed—if assumed they were—and the characters of the drama well cast. After a glance at his pilgrim friend, who was evidently the leader of the party, he of the pack thus replied to the complimentary speech of the Prior.

“ You do us far too much honour, my lord. My friend is here only as a wandering Minnesinger, willing to return your hospitality with his best ability in the exercise of his tuneful art, to which, did I not fear to hurt his modesty, I might recount many an honourable testimony. For my unworthy self, but that, weary of the load, I shifted my pack to the broad back of my guide, I would have made bold to have opened it before these gallant captains. It contains jewels of rare water, rings and chains for fair hands, and fair captors; spices and condiments, special antidotes for the chills of snowy regions; and quintessenze, thrice distilled in the alembic of the famed friars of the Maria Maggiore of fair Firenze. If your reverence willed it, the fellow in the keeping of my merchandise might be summoned hither with it.”

“ The night wears, my son; but the Cellarer shall talk to thee anent thy goods on the morrow,” said the Prior, “ when

these Messers shall have a look at thy braveries," he added, as he marked their eager looks. "At present, I would hear from thee—for men of thy calling deal liberally with such ware—the general gossip anent this sudden parting of the two princes."

"I can only hand you the nut to crack yourself, reverend father, since it is too hard for other men's teeth. Howbeit, from the day when the chances of the fight threw the son of the murdered Albert into the power of his rival, Louis of Bavaria, and deprived him of both crown and liberty, Fortune, to make amends for the wrong, gave him special grace in the sight of his conqueror. They shared the same chamber, sat at the same board, joined in the same sports; and if Louis kept his imperial crown as his especial right, all else was generously shared with his rival. Judging from the love which knit these princes, men say that Frederick is returned only to settle with his brothers; though some, again, opine that it is to collect money for his ransom."

"And there are others, I think you reported, gallant captain," interrupted the Prior, turning to one of the free-booters, "who believe the Duke returns for the espousals of his fair daughter, the Princess Bertha, with the Emperor's son, Maurice."

"May that foul lie choke all who utter it!" exclaimed the Pilgrim, the blood crimsoning his cheeks and his eyes flashing fire.

"Softly, softly, sir Pilgrim!" said the Prior dryly. "As thou most sagely observed'st, it ill becometh one of thy holy vocation to take cognizance of the affairs of thy betters; still less does it agree with such to give way to risings of choler. But if such be thy mistrust of Prince Maurice's pretensions,—a true son of the Church—what sayest thou to those of an earlier wooer of the royal maiden, the titular King of Bohemia, of whose orthodoxy men speak not so confidently?"

"I leave his majesty to plead his own suit," said the Pilgrim coldly.

“And he will do so with success,” broke in the Pedlar warmly, “if the Princess be, as we are told, a lover of truth, bravery, and—”

“Then let John of Luxemburg’s deeds speak for him,” said the Pilgrim, as he laid his hand on his young friend’s arm with a sweet smile, and then turned to address the Prior. “Tell me, reverend father, I pray, are the Princess Bertha’s charms such as to warrant this royal rivalry?”

“Charms? Tush, man! where, out of a fairy tale, do we hear of princesses being sought for their beauty, even did it outshine that of Helen of Troy? Yet the daughter of Frederick gave promise of extraordinary gifts, both of nature and grace, when I saw her in her childhood.”

“Saw thou the Princess Bertha?”

“How should I not, when I lived in the Castle of Hapsburg as chaplain and confessor before I was promoted to this lofty position on old St. Gothard. But”—and the twinkle of his eye showed that the good father was glad of an opportunity of revenging his baffled curiosity—“grave Pilgrim, thou wilt turn with a holy gusto from these earthly beauties to descant on the charms of her whose shrine, I conclude, you are about to visit—the fairest among the fair.”

“Does your reverence mean the *black* Virgin of Einsiedlen?”

This question was asked by the bo-peep Pedlar; but the shot fell harmless, for in all concerning his Church, her saints and miracles, the Prior’s keen sense of the ridiculous and his innate truthfulness were warped. He saw nothing absurd in a black Virgin, nothing questionable in the lying trash reported of her, and answered without suspicion of ridicule,—

“Ay, my good pedlar; who else could I mean but our peerless Lady? Where shall we find one again so—”

“Lofty or so black.”

“Rightly defined; for where shall we see elsewhere an image of such miraculous powers and of such rare beauty; being of marble of the purest veins and of the deepest ebony?”

A sly glance from the hypocritical Pedlar encouraged the

further insinuation, “of the equality of the Lady of Loretta and her *maison ambulante*.”

“Tush! young man. She did, I own—and all honour be to her!—cause the house in which she domiciled to be borne aloft in the air to Loretta. But what is this to peopling the wilds of Einsiedlen with holy pilgrims? What is it to the taming of ravens—birds of unclean lives and murderous cravings—so that they of their own accord bore testimony against, and brought to justice the assassins of the holy hermit? What is this to—”

Here the Prior’s hagiology was brought to a pause by a petition, sent from the greater part of the company, to allow the Minstrel to give them a specimen of his art. This application, falling so much in with the Prior’s humour, would have been granted at once, had he not deemed it decorous to make some stipulations suited to the sanctity of the place and his priorial dignity.

“Music,” he said, “should be the handmaid of devotion; and, provided we keep her in subjection to her mistress, she will do her honour and service. Neither would I limit her duty to the walls of a church, but would permit her to exercise her voice and lute to lighten toil and sweeten rest. Therefore, if this gentle Minstrel will tune his strings—I say not too strictly to the chants of the great Gregorius, or the litanies of the Church, but, abstaining from profane songs of love and war, will edify us with some saintly legend—I will place no obstacle to your enjoyment, gallant sirs, nor deem it obligatory to retire myself, or cause my brothers to quit the refectory.”

This speech was accompanied by a graceful bend of the time-honoured head to those addressed, turning at its close towards the young Minstrel with a smile of winning benevolence. And truly he was one to draw on him a good man’s blessing. He advanced, rather abstractedly than timidly, into the centre of the circle, ran a rapid yet impressive finger over his harp, an instrument of fine tone and more than ordinary compass, and then bending to the Prior, said,—

“Your lordship commands a legend of the Church; let it be that of

SAINT CHRISTOPHER AND THE INFANT SAVIOUR.

“A hermit knelt at break of day
 (‘Twas in summer’s jocund tide),
 When all was still, save cushat dove
 And stream by mountain side.
 His soul was gentle as that dove,
 Pure as that mountain spray,
 And he ready help and counsel gave
 To all who passed that way.

But who is this with aspect wild,
 What giant dark and tall?
 Why comes he to the holy man?
 Why thus upon him call?
 ‘Oh, holy father, at thy feet
 Behold me prostrate lie,
 A wretched sinner—give relief;
 Assoil me, or I die!’

‘God only can forgive, my son,’
 The aged hermit said,
 And as he spake he laid his hand
 Upon the suppliant’s head.
 ‘But if thou wilt thy sins confess,
 Do penance, pray, and fast—’
 ‘All, all, if thou but promise me
 Pardon and peace at last.’

‘Then haste to far-famed Jordan’s stream,
 And through its swelling tide
 The pilgrims on thy shoulders bear
 Safe to the other side.
 There patient ply thy daily task
 Through many a weary day,
 Till One come by who all thy sins
 And griefs shall chase away.’

And he has hied to Jordan’s bank,
 To ply his daily task;
 And bear across the rapid stream
 All who assistance ask.
 Through autumn’s blast and winter’s snow,
 Through summer’s sultry ray—
 Yet all in vain; for no one came
 To wash his sins away.

At length, by hope so long delayed,
 With pain and sorrow spent,
 Whilst early snows have blanched his head
 And his tall stature bent—
 The saint has laid him down to die
 Upon that reedy shore,
 When he hears again the pilgrim-cry—
 ‘Arise, and bear me o’er !’

It was a lovely child who spake,
 And a heavy cross he bore.
 ‘Arise,’ he cried, ‘and carry me
 Safely to yonder shore ;
 And thou this cross must also take,
 For who the crown would wear
 Must with it, for the Saviour’s sake,
 His shame and burden bear.’

But, oh, no sooner had the saint
 Lifted that wondrous boy,
 Than e’en the pond’rous cross seemed light
 In his abounding joy !
 For at that touch the heavier load
 Of unforgiven sin—
 The load of sorrow and remorse—
 Had straight removèd been.

And now right joyfully they sped
 Through the glad wave—but ere
 They reached the shrine the child had fled,
 Though still the cross lay there.
 And Christopher did never more
 That holy rood lay down,
 Till called to fill a throne above,
 And wear a martyr’s crown.”

The bell for complines rang just as the Minstrel struck his modulating chords, but it could scarcely be heard amid the loud plaudits of the delighted listeners. The Prior and his monks arose, and bowed courteously to the standing guests ; but before retiring the hospitable superior gave his orders to some lay brothers in attendance to conduct the strangers to their sleeping apartments, and be careful to supply them with all the comforts the Hospice afforded, wishing them a good night’s rest therein. Then, turning with more marked cour-

tesy to the Pilgrim and his party, and laying his hand on the Minstrel's bowing head, he added with considerable emotion, "May God bless thee, my son! Thou dost worthily occupy thy talent. When music and religion are united, and such fingers as thine guide the strings, the harmony is truly divine. May St. Cecilia preserve her votary from all discord or false combinations!"

The lay brother, who officiated as groom of the chambers, led the travellers through some long galleries in an upper story of the building, with doors opening on either side into small, but comparatively convenient sleeping-rooms. The conductor somewhat ostentatiously opened one or two, and shut them with an expression of disappointment at finding them already occupied. There was a stir of life about this side of the house which evidenced its destination as the dormitory of the convent guests, and contrasted with the gloom and stillness of a more distant wing, into which the travellers were afterwards conducted. Here, where the only sound proceeded from the echo of their own footsteps, the friar stopped before a low door, took a key from his sleeve, unlocked and introduced the pilgrims into a small apartment bearing the air of an anchorite's cell rather than that of a guest chamber. Such, probably, was the impression of one of the younger travellers, who observed, with more haughtiness than became his pack,—

"I have heard the hospitalities of St. Gothard commended, both as to board and bed; and though too much cannot be said of the quality and plenty of the one, little can be advanced as to the size or comfort of the other."

"Nor," chimed in his gentler companion, "can we believe our generous host would deem his orders well obeyed by such accommodation as this."

"And yet, fair sirs, ye have to thank his reverence for what is wanting in yours. Had he not detained ye in talk after the other guests had started, they would not have secured the best apartments. Anyhow, this will furnish all a pilgrim needs."

"Thou art right, good brother, and were the pallet yet harder, think not we would be so ungrateful as to complain. My friends thought only of *my* accommodation, not their own."

"In proof of which," said the Minstrel, "I crave to lie on my cloak, if room be found on the stone floor beside the so-called bed."

"And I desire nothing better," added his companion, "than to make mine at the door."

Neither of these propositions, though eagerly urged, was granted; and that to remain to aid the Pilgrim was as doggedly refused by the surly friar, who answered, with increasing roughness, "Tut, young sirs, I can wait for no further fooling. Come, away to your chambers! if room can be found; but ye saw I sought it vainly in many. Come, away! Palmers do not require serving-varlets."

The young men showed no disposition to obey, but at length yielded to the Pilgrim's remonstrances, and reluctantly left him alone in his comfortless domicile. He was too weary and exhausted to dwell long on the strange behaviour of the lay brother, so opposed to the urbanity of the Prior and the other dwellers of the Hospice, and, after his usual devotions, he laid himself down on his hard pallet, but not soon to sleep. The storm had passed off, and a bright frosty moonlight struggled through a narrow opening in the wall, the only inlet for light or air, and partially illuminated a crucifix and skull fixed against the wall: a further confirmation of the Pilgrim's suspicion that the chamber was not one of those appropriated to the traveller, but the cell of a lay brother.

"For what purpose had he been placed in it?" he asked himself, and then smiled at the folly of making a wonder of what was in reality so simple. "The large number of arrivals had filled the other rooms, and this had been—but he would puzzle no longer, but enjoy, homely and hard as it was, the accommodation allotted him."

With this sensible conclusion he composed himself to sleep. Alas! the haze of a partial insensibility conjured up

a more appalling vision. The Franciscan Friar seemed to stand before him in the moonlight. He started up; looked resolutely at the deceiving gleam and turned once more to sleep, muttering,—

“The foul fiend fly away with him, for his he certainly is! I will think no more of those goggle orbs. Avaunt!”

But, one ghost banished, others glided in, and sleep for some time was wooed in vain. Heavy responsibilities and doubtful hazards strove hard with fatigue and drowsiness, and when even the over-watched eyes closed in sleep, maintained their influence in visions of the night. The cold glaring eyes of the Friar haunted his dreams. Sometimes he climbed the sides of a steep mountain, and beheld them looking down from the summit. Anon he plunged into icy caves, and they gleamed from their darkest recesses. Now they glared from the bars of a prison and seemed to shed tears of blood; then as the ken of an eagle whose talons fixed themselves on his heart. Amid these uneasy slumbers, the half-conscious listener is aware of a stealthy footstep in the vaulted passage outside, and, as he gradually awoke, became also aware of its nearer approach to the door of his room or cell, and of its there pausing for some seconds. The door of the narrow apartment was so near the pallet on which its occupant lay, so still was all around, so intently did he listen, that the breathing of some one outside was distinctly audible. The Pilgrim was furnished with a dagger, which he unsheathed, and prepared himself for the momentary onslaught of what he doubted not was either an assassin hired to take his life—a traffic by no means rare in those days—or else a common brigand, tempted perhaps by the ring of very obtrusive brilliancy which he wore on his finger.

Whilst the listener hesitated whether to await or commence the attack, the breathing ceased to be audible, and footsteps were again heard to proceed along the passage, until the sound was lost in distance, and all again was still.

“Do I yet dream?” was the natural inference; and during the next five minutes the inquirer tried to persuade his un-

willing senses that such was really the deception they had practised on him ; until they relaxed their watchfulness, and the struggle ended in the painful half-consciousness of nightmare. Again the eagle fixes his claws on his breast, seemingly to suck his life blood—again he strives to throw him off ; and yet more deadly is the struggle becoming, when, lo ! the mysterious foot-tread, louder, quicker, and more distinct than before, is heard to proceed along the passage. Nearer and nearer it approaches, until it stops at the door. A hand is laid on the latch ; a shadow darkens the line of light on the floor ; a breath is on the forehead of the sleeper ; a voice calls on him to arise.

“ Can this be a dream ? ”

He tries to lift himself, but the eagle presses on his heart—to articulate, but it stifles his breath.

Once more the voice is heard,—

“ Awake, awake, Pilgrim ! ”

The spell is dissolved, and the Hunter of the Alps stands in the moonbeam at the bedside.

“ Fear not,” he said, as he put aside the dagger the Pilgrim had grasped. “ I come to caution, not to injure : but my visit is perilous for us both. Beware of the cowed friar ! Leave these walls as the first streak of dawn tinges the snow, and close not your eyes until you are safe without them. Farewell for the present : forewarned, forearmed.”

The friendly monitor had vanished ere the sleeper had quite thrown off the incubus that oppressed him ; and it was some time ere he could separate the sleeping from the waking vision. The Hunter’s form, his voice, his caution, seemed like a distant memory rather than a passing scene. It were needless to relate the doubts and surmises which crossed the Pilgrim’s mind ; but, resolutely repelling all that affected the truthfulness of the Hunter’s warning, he determined to observe it, by seeking his companions at dawn, and leaving the Hospice together with them. To observe the equally important caution of watchfulness, the Pilgrim arose and dressed himself ; then committing himself into the hands of his Almighty Protector, he sat down

on the floor at the side of the bed, and resting his back against it, endeavoured, by dwelling on the dangers of his present position, and the doubts which beset his future path, to prevent his eyes from closing ; but all his efforts were vain. The sleep of the wayfaring man is sweet, but it is also imperative. Nature, gentle nurse though she be, is inflexible in her exactions ; and although the mind long kept watch, she came with her poppy wreath and inky brush, and the tired traveller sank into the dreamless sleep of the weary and the robust.

The dawn had flushed the mountain tops before the Pilgrim rose from his uneasy posture ; and, with the mists of night, had chased away the mists of suspicion also, to which his nature was little prone. Still, his trust in the Hunter's honesty led him to regard his warning, and he left his haunted chamber to seek his companions ; and, after a brief farewell to the Prior, to accompany them on their way. After losing his way at the onset amid a labyrinth of stone passages, he fortunately met a stray monk who conducted him to the room in which the guests had met on the preceding evening ; and here he found a like plentifully-covered table and hearty welcome. And who, amongst the tens of thousands who have received a welcome, as warm and unconstrained, from the first mountain refuge built in far bygone ages, to that of the present year of grace 1871, but must remember their mountain sojourn, however brief the stay, as a bright, romantic, unforgettable dream, when far more recent, and it may be more notable, events are forgotten. That welcome, so *one* in its unremunerated and comprehensive hospitality ; offered to the whole family of man without demand or questioning—whosoever they may be, or may have been—from whencesoever they come or whithersoever they go.

Such were the thoughts that passed through the mind of our traveller as he looked around on the motley group that surrounded the well-spread board. He found not his friends amongst them, and concluded, from their tardiness in leaving them, that they had found more comfortable beds than had fallen to his lot.

These speculations were cut short by the entrance of the Cellarer, courteously inviting him to a parley with his superior.

“But his reverence furthermore begs he may not interrupt or hurry your refection.”

“That does he not: I have played the part of a good trencherman, and, by my faith, in such air to whet, and with such viands to satisfy hunger, I commend your self-denial, good brother, in keeping your fasts.”

They found the Prior in solemn consultation with some of his officials.

“This is an untoward business,” said he, on the Pilgrim’s entrance. “Your guide has decamped with the young Pedlar’s pack, containing, as he avers, many rare and costly articles. Now, being fully aware that the fair fame of our house is concerned in the discovery of the thief, and the restoration of the stolen goods, I have despatched the careless merchant and his companion—a rare musicianer that—together with a sturdy mountaineer, who knows all the passes of the mountains, in search of him.”

“I would, reverend father,” said the disconcerted Pilgrim, “that in doing them this service you had roused me for the chase.”

“There was not a moment to be lost, son,” said the Prior hastily; “moreover, the lay brother sought, and found you not in your chamber.”

“Nay, reverend father, how could that be?” But the Pilgrim stopped, as he feared if he were to enter into the history of his night’s adventures, it would entangle him in endless explanations and retard his departure.

“How could it be? Why, doubtless, you were in the refectory. But cheer up! I promised the young gallants I would detain you till they returned.”

“Not so!” exclaimed the Pilgrim, with more determination than suited his pious calling. “I will haste me at once in search of them.”

“With as much chance of finding them as a needle in a bundle of hay.”

The Prior's *bon mot* did not improve the Pilgrim's humour. The Hunter's words of warning still rang in his ears, and the impression was deepened by the disappearance of his friends. To doubt the kind open-browed Prior was impossible; but might he not have been deceived?

One of the brothers now entered with the intelligence that a lay brother had met the party, at some distance from the Hospice, on their way down the mountain to the hamlet of Wasan, having discovered some traces of the fugitive thief.

"Whither I will follow them," said the Pilgrim resolutely.

"Why, this is worse than a moon's madness! Wasan is on the farther side of the Devil's Bridge. The road is perilous and intricate; thou canst not find it without a guide. It is untoward that all our other guests are bound to the other side of St. Gothard. It seems these militaires had smelt the battle from afar, and are going to get a share of the spoil. His Holiness and the Emperor are already weary of their short and hollow truce. But say, brother Sacristan, hast thou not a guide for this holy man?"

"It is unfortunate," observed the monk, "that this is the eve of the Festival of the Cross, and all who have not already been spared to go in search of the miscreant are engaged in preparations; but, now I remember me, there is a Franciscan friar about to take his departure for the plain, who will bear the Pilgrim company."

"Company?" repeated the Prior. "If thou meanest Gotfried, he will be thus far good company that he will not betray secrets nor weary with his converse."

"But you must allow, reverend father, that what he lacks in two senses he makes up for in a third."

"True, those surprising goggles make up all deficiencies of ear and tongue."

"They must mean the odious visitant of my dream," thought the Pilgrim; and he was again on the point of relating his night's adventures, and stating his repugnance to the proposed guide, when its unreasonableness struck him so forcibly as in

some measure to conquer it ; whilst the knowledge of the poor man's infirmities tended to lessen it.

The Prior now broke up the conclave ; and when alone with his guest (after desiring the Friar to be summoned), he took a packet from his cabinet, and thus addressed him :—

“Thou hast signified thy intention of visiting the Emperor’s tomb at Kœnigsfelden. Hard by, at St. Hilda’s cave, lives the holy hermit Celestine, an ancient and much-loved comrade of mine. Wilt thou be the bearer of this token from me ? He is a man of odorous sanctity, yet cheerful and aidful withal. If thou lackest help or needest counsel, thou wilt find him clear and bountiful as his own St. Hilda’s fountain. With this letter thou wilt convey to him the assurance of the unabated love of the writer, and say—But hide it in thy bosom, for here comes the Friar, who has eyes, if not ears, and of surpassing magnitude ; and I would not that they should see what I now commit to thy care.”

In reply to his warm acknowledgments for the Prior’s hospitality, the departing guest received as warm an invitation to repeat his visit, and to bring with him the Minstrel—“for minstrel he declared he was and must be, even though he were a king’s son ;” and the cheerful old man added waggishly,—

“If your pedlar had been brought up to his pack, he would have taken better care of it.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEVIL'S BRIDGE.

Up! up! why sleep'st thou here,
Knight without stain or fear?
There's warning on the blast!

In another five minutes the Pilgrim and the Friar were on their way. The sun had not yet dispelled the mist which curled around the mountain-tops, and rendered their narrow and rocky path more obscure: yet, vigorous and active, the Pilgrim bounded over it with rapid buoyancy, the Friar following with longer stride, but tread that staggered not beneath the weight of his gigantic and sinewy proportions.

After a rapid walk, nay, rather *flight*—for certainly the descent of a Swiss Alp in summer's early morn approaches as near flying as man's “too solid flesh” can compass—of two leagues, our travellers rested a few minutes, and took some slight refreshment at a wayside house of refuge, when they again pursued their journey. The weather was fine; the mists had rolled off the mountain-tops, which reflected the rays of the sun from the pure untrodden snow that covered them. Innumerable flowers glistened with deeper died lustre amid the dewdrops. The little goatherd culled nosegays of the fairest for the passing travellers, whilst his playful goats peeped over the points of the rocks. The cows grazed on the fragrant herb, and the rosy milkmaid filled wooden bowls of their frothy milk, and asked in return a blessing from the holy strangers.

Who in such scenes could feel care or suspicion?

Our traveller banished both from a mind little susceptible of either—a mind open, generous, grand as the scenes he passed through. Even the haunting eye of his

companion ceased to be viewed but as a medium through which compensating Nature strove to make amends for the senses she had denied. Thus, in total silence was their journey continued until the sun declined towards the mountain-tops, and warned of parting day. The rugged pathway became narrower, and winded through a sterner region. The flowery pastures of the upland gradually converged into a steep defile, closed in by rocks whose steep sides were scared by the torrents of melted snow which rushed down them, hastening, as it would seem, to join in the fierce encounter of the warring flood, whose roar was at each step becoming more audible.

Nature at this point appeared to be gathering up herself for one great effort. Not a blade of fresh herbage was to be culled from those naked rocks; no flocks or herds quenched their thirst from those icy streams; and, though forests of dark pines waved on their summits, no bird of the woodlands caroled amongst the branches. The vulture clapped his dusky wing amid the clefts of the precipices, and with the monarch eagle reigned exultingly over the dreary waste.

As the travellers proceeded, an immense rock, jutting out into the river, seemed to deny all further progress—we speak of ages long before the year 1767, when a less hazardous passage was bored through the solid rock—except by a shelf of boards suspended by chains from above. This passed, the torrent of the Reuss was approached, and the most awfully beautiful spot in Switzerland lay before their eyes. Even now, when precipices have been levelled, paths widened and smoothed, and when a solid bridge of masonry is thrown across the boiling torrent, the most hardy tourist cannot view it with an emotion unmixed with fear. What, then, must have been the courage required when, as at the period of which we write, a single arch of slight masonry alone spanned the world of waters, rushing, struggling and foaming into the chasm below! There, in the sight of these two lone travellers of five bygone centuries, it stood, resting on a point

of rock on either side, seemingly as the spider's web that hangs between the prickly branches of the dewy gorse, and lifted seventy feet above the yawning chasm. Down this abyss the torrent thundered, "lifting up his voice on high," and reading man the same unchanging lesson of the progress of time—for ever flowing, but once passed, never to be recalled.

"This air-hung bridge," thought the Pilgrim, as he approached it, "with its quivering planks and mocking parapet, is worthy of its architect, and rightly bears his name. I hardly like to cross it, and in such companionship more especially;" and he turned to his companion, who shrank back and betrayed an evident reluctance to proceed.

"Good brother," said the Pilgrim aloud, "I marvel not at thy fears, and I would help thee, but that the passage is too strait to admit a second with one of thy dimensions; and that, moreover, I feel my head is somewhat of a traitor to my heels. I bethink me, however, that thou hast the advantage in the close sealing of thy ears to this confounding din; and therefore, by my troth, thou shalt peril the first transit."

This speech was accompanied by a gesture so commanding and significant that the cowled guide offered no further resistance. It was not, however, until he had crossed the bridge, which trembled beneath his heavy but unfaltering tread, that his companion began the perilous passage. Keenly susceptible of the beautiful and the sublime, inured to danger, and almost exulting in peril, the Pilgrim had scarcely reached the middle of the bridge ere he forgot all caution, and gave himself up to an unreserved enjoyment of the stern scenes around. Seating himself on the low parapet to watch the tumbling of the waters, amid the thick vapour and deafening din, he was led insensibly into a comparison of the restless struggle with that of his own stormy life, and—for there are passages in the history of the illustrious when even inanimate objects seem commissioned to prophesy of the future—reading in the progress of the mountain torrent, as it wound its way through the caverned rocks, a foreshadowing of his own darkened destiny.

And thus apostrophizing it, the deep and mournful tones of his voice mingled with the torrent's din—

“ Ay, thou brawler, what art thou but an emblem of my restless self?—thy source derived from the loftiest mountain rock, thy course headlong and impetuous, chafing at every impediment, foaming over every obstacle, destroying where thou shouldest fertilize, and rushing onward to the precipice to be lost in darkness and oblivion ; whilst Envy, like that screaming vulture, will exult in thy destruction.”

He stopped, for the shrill note, rising again over the brawling of the waters, interrupted the soliloquy.

“ No; it is no ill-boding vulture's scream I hear. It is a whistle—a signal perchance—a warning note blown by friendly breath, to chide my folly in lingering in the very mouth of destruction.”

He sprang to his feet, roused to a sense of his perilous situation. Was it not, alas, too late? for in the same moment he became conscious of a slight trembling of the bridge as if swayed by the tread of a heavy footstep. The haze raised by the foaming cataract prevented his seeing the other and more distant bank, or even distinctly discerning any object advancing in its direction; but a dark and deepening shadow too plainly evidenced that danger was near; and the Pilgrim knew full well the quarter from which to prepare to meet it. Instinctively he felt for his dagger. It was gone! and the horrors of his situation stood out clearly before him; for memory in such moments unlocks all her cells. The mysterious visitor of his dream—the object of the Hunter's warnings and his own suspicions, were all embodied in the revolting form of his treacherous guide, who he felt convinced had robbed him of his dagger. Then came crowding in vain regrets for his imprudence, and that to him the bitterest where all were bitter—an ignominious death and nameless grave! But, with a presence of mind which the future could not cloud, he at once perceived the only alternatives of action open to him. Either he must recross the bridge, with the risk of being stabbed in the back or precipitated into the flood, or he must, unarmed, await

the powerful onset of the assassin in a situation in which, even under ordinary circumstances, it would require no ordinary self-possession to maintain a footing. Yet this last, as more consonant with a brave man's spirit, he chose. Securing his position as best he might, by pressing close to the parapet, with every muscle knit to resistance, and every sense awake to observation, he extended his right arm to receive and, if possible, ward off the impending attack. The next moment proved the wisdom, though not, alas, the efficiency of the effort.

Advancing with cautious steps through the haze, now deepened by the shades of closing day, the assassin's hope was to have plunged his dagger into the heart of an unsuspecting victim. He was not, consequently, prepared for the resistance which turned aside the weapon, though it could not wrest it from his iron grasp. Foiled for one moment, it was only to throw himself the next with renewed force on his brave opponent, who, closing in the death strife, and exclaiming, "We perish together," twined his more pliant limbs round those of his ponderous assailant. The cowardly miscreant saw his inevitable destruction, should he remain another moment linked in such desperate struggle on the brink of the yawning grave. His aim was the life of his victim; he had not calculated on the sacrifice of his own; as he had felt secure of being able to slake his thirst in the blood of that unarmed victim without shedding one drop of his own. Retreating, therefore, a few paces, he stood with dilated nostril and eye glaring with intense resolution, his arm stretched forth and hand grasping the unsheathed dagger. For a few seconds he remained immovable as if with the intent of taking a surer aim, or gloating over anticipated vengeance. In the intensity of that pause—eye to eye, with Death under one of his most hideous forms, still determined on resistance, although he knew too well it would be in vain; but—whilst renouncing all hope for the present—the Pilgrim raised a fervent prayer to Heaven for pardon for the past.

The sound of the whistle, louder and nearer than before,

again awakens a hope of deliverance. Alas, from whence should it come ? Human aid would but accelerate his fate ; the first rescuing footstep be but a signal for plunging the threatening dagger into his breast.

“Can it spring,” he asks, “from the depths below ? Will it descend from the heights above ? It does—merciful Heaven ! it does.”

The whirring of an arrow is heard. The “Avenger” is again on its flight. The winged deliverer, cleaving the air and whirring past the ear of the doomed, as if to apprise him that deliverance was at hand, plunged its barbed dart into the arm raised to shed his blood. The dagger, released from the nerveless fingers, glanced from the low parapet, and was borne off like a straw or withered leaf by the scornful flood.

The wounded man staggered, but ere he fell a friendly hand had extricated his intended victim, and conducted him safe to the farther bank.

“No thanks—no thanks,” said the Hunter—for the reader has guessed it was he, the Tell of Uri, who alone could have sent that unerring arrow from the bow—“at least, such are not *my* due ;” and he pointed upward.

Then pouring from the flask that hung at his side a few drops of the “mountain nectar” into a wooden cup, filled at the stream, he offered it, saying,—

“Drink this, sir Pilgrim ; you need it ; and lie you down on this grassy mound—it will refresh and tranquillize you—whilst I complete your deliverance: the snake is scotched, but not killed.”

As he spoke, he laid an arrow on the string and took aim at the wounded man, who still lay extended on the bridge.

“By our mutual hopes of peace below and pardon above,” exclaimed the Pilgrim, springing up, “lay not this murder on our souls ! So lately rescued from death myself, let me plead for the reptile’s life !” and he laid his hand with gentle pressure on the Hunter’s arm.

“Murder!” reiterated the latter, with scorn. “Is it murder

to prevent the viper who has twice attempted your life from stinging you with surer aim?"

"I know my danger; and yet, in this hour of deliverance, I would show to others the mercy so freely, so wondrously bestowed on myself—and by the same hand."

Here the Pilgrim's voice assumed the earnest tone of supplication, as with clasped hands he added—

"My noble deliverer, the brave are always the merciful. Grant me the wretch's life as a *thank-offering!*"

"So be it," said the Hunter; and he took off his bonnet, and raised his eyes brimful of tears as he solemnly added, "And *an atonement.*"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE REVENGE.

Forgiveness to the injured doth belong;
He never pardons who hath done the wrong.

THE deliverer and the rescued remained some time standing on the brink of the torrent, their eyes fixed on the bridge. The Pilgrim spoke first.

“I shall not, I *cannot*, Hunter, attempt to repay my infinite obligations to you, but I would at least acknowledge them. Tell me, have you any desire to leave your mountains? or is there anything which would render your condition more easy? in one word, have you any wish?

“I have, if it be not too bold.”

“Name it.”

“Your friendship.”

“Thou hast it already; but if there is aught else, and in my power, thou shalt not need to name it twice. But we will return to this theme anon. Our present endeavour must be to rescue yon miserable caitiff. It were but a sorry boon to turn away the arrow, and leave him to die in that turmoil of waters.”

“His wound is little more than skin-deep, and the roar of the torrent will not disturb him, if, as men say, he’s deaf.”

“*As men say*. Do you, then, doubt his incapacity either of hearing or speech?”

“The last perchance: but fear worketh miracles, and I thought I heard a cry of help to the Virgin as my arrow reached its aim. It was not from your lips, sir Pilgrim?”

“No, brave archer, no! In my extremity, I go direct to the fountain-head for deliverance. But what knowest thou of this man?”

“I have come across him in more ways than I wished. He is a friar of Koenigsfelden and an especial favourite of the Abbot, and goes by the name of his *spectacles*; the lay brothers declaring that Providence has made amends for denying him ears and tongue by the size of his eyes and the keenness of his vision, which nothing escapes. They add, moreover, that he has a miraculous touch, by which he conveys all the knowledge thus acquired to the cognizance of his superior. I am inclined, nevertheless, to believe the deficiency to be real.”

“It is certainly well counterfeited and wonderfully sustained; for his eye never blenches, and nothing betrays the least consciousness of sound.”

“Yet I trust, Pilgrim, that neither you nor your companions betrayed your secret before him.”

“Our secret? then, you think we have one?”

The Swiss smiled and so did the questioner, and added,—

“Well, *you* at least have claims on my confidence, which shall be acknowledged when the due time arrives. Plague on it! why did I not know of this doubt before? I would have furnished the spy with some choice information for his employer.”

“You suspect, then, he had one?”

“I might do so, for there is likelihood enough to warrant such belief. But, whatever minor inducements might have existed, I feel assured that personal hatred gave vigour to the deed. The savage thirsted for my blood for his *own* gratification. I saw it in the glaring of his eyeballs, in the eagerness, yet trembling of every limb. A hired assassin would have done the deed more coolly and more surely.”

“And do you remember having ever given cause for such dire revenge?”

“On the contrary, I am positive I never saw the Friar before—at least, as *such*. Nor have I the least recollection of aught about him, unless it be those hideous eyes; and when I try to link them with events or purposes, my memory denies all aid.”

After a little further converse, the Hunter was prevailed on

to consent to walk again across the bridge to where the wounded man still lay.

“Have a care,” said he, stepping before; “the wretch is not yet disabled from mischief.”

These fears, for the present, were groundless, for the cautious guardian had scarcely placed his foot on the bridge ere the guilty wretch, so mercifully pardoned, without one sign of courtesy or acknowledgment of favour, arose, recrossed the bridge, and pursued his way, evidently little injured, down the mountain. The new-made friends watched the receding form until out of sight, with the shuddering disgust a wounded man might feel at the view of the weapon which had been just drawn reeking from his bleeding side; and yet they were men of no ordinary courage and resolution.

That Pilgrim, so called, and that Swiss Bowman were decreed—the one to fill a page in the history of nations, and to furnish a melancholy episode in that of the field of Cressy; the other to furnish the minstrels of his own age, and the poets and dramatists of ours, with one of the most exciting of themes.

“This, then, is thy revenge,” said the Hunter, “to endeavour to bind the wounds of the arm lifted to slay thee, and to let the assassin go scatheless on his way? But thou art right; for thou canst wend on thine unaccompanied by a worse companion—remorse.”

“Tell me, friend,” said the Pilgrim, anxious both to dispel the cloud which began to gather over the fine countenance of his friend, as well as to return to a subject of paramount interest—“tell me, I pray thee, where didst thou meet this mysterious being? How didst thou gain an inkling of his intentions in order to convey to me a timely warning? How didst thou hear of my having left the Hospice, and thus arrive at that critical moment? In short, I have a thousand questions to ask, all of which I would have answered in a breath.”

“I will draw the longest I can to gratify you,” said the Hunter, smiling; “but my story will be none of the shortest,

and will require my only breath in the narrator, but patience is the humor. Will it please ye that we rest on this bank; we shall have time before the rest of the party can join us, and remain here to discern them when they have scaled yonning rock."

The proposal was gladly acceded to, and without further trouble the Hunter began:—

I have long known the character and peculiarities of
several ~~several~~ the dumb friar of Koenigsfelden, such as I
have already described them to you. We have often passed
out ~~out~~ in the mountains, and in straits into which few
but the chamois hunter would ever venture, but always
without the slightest sign of recognition on his side; and it
was not until a few days ago that I ever thought our acquain-
tance would have gone further on mine. Having occasion to
go to Bellinzona on a business which not unfrequently calls
me thither, I put up, as is my wont, at the hostelry of a
tavern at the sign of the Aquila d' Oro, in which you and
your friends were lodgers: honoured guests, who had won all
hearts by your frank bearing, your minstrel's art, and, it may
be, your open purse-strings. You will recall to mind your
charge to mine host to provide you with guides to cross the
mountains; and I prevailed on him to leave out from his list
one of whom I had heard of dark deeds perpetrated on
haunted travellers. On the same evening, the one before
your departure, as I was in the despatch of my business (I
had driven over the mountain a herd of goats for sale), I saw
this fellow, together with the dumb Friar, at a low hostelry—I
will not say in conversation, but in some kind of close com-
munication. Bootless as it seemed, and maybe officious, I
yet determined to watch their movements, and save, if I could,
a set of gallant travellers from the fate of too many in these
perilous times. You may smile at the idea of such paltry
antagonists; but treachery is not to be combated by numbers;
and, after all, I was going the same way, and I owed the
landlord the good turn of promising to make up for the
services of the guide he had left out at my desire. But how,

then, came it, sir Pilgrim, that I found him with you after all?"

"He joined us about a league from the town—sent, he said, from after-caution of mine host, who deemed we might need his services."

"The traitor! I knew it could only have been through lying and a false tongue he could have gained what he sought."

"Well, leave the caitiff, and go on with your story."

"As soon as I got rid of my one remaining goat, I set off up the mountain by a short cut, which I deemed only known to the chamois hunter, and could not well be trodden by any else; but I found the barefooted Friar kenned it, though he showed no surprise as I passed him. It was not long after that I encountered my poor eagle, and—you know the rest—and that the loitering of your companions gave the opportunity to the Friar to get the start, and probably safely sheltered in the Hospice before the storm."

"I see it all. And now tell me, why did you not follow us into the refectory?"

"Because my place was with the lay brothers, with whom I shared their evening meal. And now comes the gist of my story. I should tell you that the guides who accompanied your party were at a table in the same long hall; and, as my suspicions were awake, I watched them as acutely as I could without being observed; and this the general gloom of the apartment and the lighting up of their table enabled me to do. I saw the guide of whom I had so evil a report display several articles most suspicious of a pedlar's pack, and I doubted not were some of the contents of yours. I noticed, too, that he had not produced them until your other guides had left the table. I observed, moreover, that amongst the loiterers attracted by the glittering wares was the lay brother who has the care of the chambers; and I thought—nay, was sure—I saw him conceal a gilt picture of our Lady in his sleeve. I also observed much low parlance between the two, and that they left the hall together.

"Having some matters of business to transact concerning

the wood I supply to the Hospice, the Cellarer joined me after the rest had gone to their beds, and we remained a long time together, he having insisted on wetting our accounts with a cup of old wine. A noble spirit he, and withal a fine scholar and excellent accountant. We chatted on many topics, and it was midnight ere we parted, he going to the chapel, I to my usual dormitory, close to the cells of the lay brethren. As I proceeded through the long vaulted passage, into which I had just turned, I perceived the bulky figure of the dumb Friar at the further end. I extinguished my lamp, and by the light of that he held I watched him approach a door about half up the gallery, and lay his hand cautiously on the latch. Whether the deaf man heard any movement within, or those cat's eyes of his saw in the dark, I know not; but either eyes or ears gave the alarm, for he retired stealthily as he had advanced. I shifted my stand a little into the shade, and, as I expected, the wretch returned a second time, approached the door, and, as he laid his hand on the latch, I placed mine on his shoulder, and 'bade him retire to his rest, and not disturb that of other travellers.'

"The culprit betrayed no sign of fear or shame, but gazed on me with his cold glassy eyes, and slowly turned away. It was then I entered your apartment and conveyed my warning of your danger; but, doubtful of your watchfulness, I remained near it until the bell rang for matins, when I went to the chapel, determining, when the service closed, to inform the Cellarer of the whole matter, and to consult with him on the best means of securing your safety and the punishment of the guilty. All my wise cogitations were put to flight by a hasty summons from the Abbot. I found the reverend father, together with your two companions, in great consternation at the disappearance of one of your guides with the Pedlar's pack. To follow, and if possible overtake the thief, banished all other objects. I ventured some advice, which was readily accepted, and we all set out in full chase."

"And wherefore, I pray," interrupted the Pilgrim, "did you not invite me to join in the cry?"

"The Prior did despatch a messenger to seek you ; but, though I knew it was in a quarter in which you would not be found, I dared not say so, as I knew we had no time for explanations. Before we set out, we begged the Prior would detain you until our return, that we might descend the mountains altogether. What, then, were my fears when I found you were gone, and accompanied by the Minorite Friar!"

"Did you not send to inform me you were following in the tract of the fugitive thief towards Wasan, and to desire me to meet you there?"

"Nay, our route lay quite in another direction, and we returned to the Hospice after a couple of hours' bootless search."

"This, then, was but another mesh of the same fiendish net woven for my destruction. But go on, brave Hunter."

"I will not attempt to say what I felt at hearing you were gone, and with whom ! I did not breathe my fears to any one. I did not calculate distance or time ; I knew all hung on my overtaking you before you crossed the bridge. I set off all alone, descending the mountains with the swiftness of an avalanche, and blowing occasionally a note of warning—But you know the rest. It seemed to me I neither thought, moved, nor breathed until I saw my arrow transfix the traitor's arm."

"That arrow sent by your *unerring* hand."

"Not so, my master ; but Providence sometimes gives miraculous gifts to His meanest tools."

The Pilgrim answered only by taking the hand of his deliverer and pressing it long and fervently to his lips ; then throwing himself down on the bank on which they were resting, he buried his face in the fragrant herbage. His companion respected and shared his emotion, whilst the incessant wail of the everlasting waters gave a deeper abstraction to their meditations.

We know not how long the musers might have indulged in their delicious reverie, had not the notes of a horn suddenly roused them from its seductions. The Bowman, starting to his feet, exclaimed,—

“That is the signal of the near approach of your friends, sir Palmer. Yea, *here* come the chasseurs, but I fear not with the recovered game. See you them not turning the point of the promontory yonder? Verily, one might believe those young light of foot were the sons of our own mountains, so fearlessly do they swing from ledge to ledge of the rocking causeway.”

The greeting was a merry one, notwithstanding the unsuccess of the search and the weariness of the way; but it was unclouded by a knowledge of the danger and escape of the Pilgrim, which for the present he forebore to mention.

“I am sorry, sirs,” said the Bowman, “that my wallet is empty and my flask dry; but at a few stunden from hence you shall find a plentiful supply of homely fare, and a hearty welcome. Come, sir Pilgrim, show the way over the Devil’s Bridge, since you have laid the demon by a new kind of revenge.”

The invitation was accepted as freely as it was offered, and the whole party, guides included, crossed the fearful abyss on the crazy structure that spanned it—brave men all, and well inured to adventure over flood and fell; but there was not, we trow, one stout heart amongst them that did not beat quicker for the transit. We allude to those who were ignorant of the events which had just been enacted on the dizzy spot. What must have been the feelings of the actors in them! There remained some miles of descent ere the plain was reached, and that had to be crossed. The evening had deepened into night, and the stars came out one by one in the deep violet heavens. They were a silent party, though there lacked not food for converse; but even the guides, who at first talked freely to each other in the *patois* of their country, seemed to imbibe the taciturn humour of their masters, and became in their turn mute. No sound broke on the stillness of night save theplash of the lake and the croak of the frogs amid its sedgy borders. At length, the glimmering of lights was discerned on the farther verge of the plain, and the Hunter exclaimed,—

"Cheer up, my masters, yonder is Bürglen, where rest and refreshment await us."

In another half-hour they had reached the hamlet, and after passing through the long straggling street, the party were brought up before a commodious farm-house, built of wood and ornamented, as is still the Swiss custom, with texts of Scripture gaily and tastefully painted. These the darkness prevented our travellers from deciphering, but they could discern from the lights blazing within, that the habitation was some stories high, and that the principal one was approached by an outer staircase, and was surrounded by a gallery.

"If you will wait below one moment," said the owner of the mansion, "I will inform my folk of your approach."

His watched-for step had not reached the top ere the door was thrown open, and "The master is come" was repeated by the whole family, who hastened to it to greet and embrace him.

"There, there, a thousand blessings on ye all! But here are some travellers who need lodging and refreshment. This way, my masters; a hearty welcome to the homestead of the Swiss Archer."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HERO OF ALTDORFF.

There were giants in the earth in those days.

THE scene which the Swiss kitchen presented to the weary and hungry travellers gained additional life and cheerfulness from its contrast with the gloom and solitude from which they had just emerged. The apartment was large, occupying nearly one story of the house. On two sides of it, rows of casements proved that light and air were not taxed in that free country. The immense chimney occupied one half of the lower end, the space on either side being filled by shelves and cupboards for culinary utensils and other household appliances; together with a large settle, which offered its seat of warmth and honour to the aged and the stranger. Capacious as the chimney was, it was piled with branches of oak and elm; and on a large beam which stretched across it were affixed iron crooks, from which depended a numerous host of pots and kettles containing the soup, vegetables and savoury meat, preparing for the coming meal, whose odour was not unwelcome to the hungry expectants.

The mistress, a fine dignified woman in the cantonal costume—a meet wife and daughter for heroes—presided over this department, aided by a blooming damsel or two, and a lad whose chief office it was to feed the glowing, crackling, cooking, warming, enlivening blaze, which, with the addition of some pine-torches, completely lighted up the room. At the other end were assembled several *spinsters*, young and old, twisting the home-grown hemp into thread for home-made garments; their whirring and revolving wheels keeping time and tune with the buzz of tongues, and an occasional snatch of song.

As the foreground to the picture—for all pictures must have such—on the settle near the fire sat a fine old man, venerable but not infirm, with a pretty little girl on his knee, and a large wolf-dog at his feet, gaunt and shaggy, but looking with unmistakeable affection into the eyes of his master, and patiently, as if for his sake, submitting to the somewhat choking caresses of the little damsel.

“My Margaret,” said the host on their entrance, “I have brought you three gallant travellers, whom my father and yourself will make welcome, whilst I obey a summons just brought me from poor dying Elric, the goatherd, whom the messenger reports to be in extremity and urgent for my presence. My masters,” he added, and his eye brightened and his whole form dilated, “this is my wife’s father, and our honoured parent, Walter Furst of Uri.”

The mistress did her part in the reception with the self-possession of a queen, and the old man with the native independence and innate grace of a Swiss Cincinnatus, as, rising and pointing to the warmest seats, he said,—

“Approach, I pray ye, travellers. The fire is pleasant after the cold blast of the mountain; you will also, an’t please ye, take a sup and bit of our cake and cordial, as a good fore-runner of the evening meal. Gretchen, do thou serve the guests. Cold, hunger, and weariness are often forced companions of our journeyings, but we gladly bid them good-by at the end.”

Whilst the fine old man spoke, the eyes of the travellers were riveted on his noble and expressive countenance; and even when he had ceased, his striking deportment and the prestige of his name seemed to awe them into silence. They, however, accepted and partook of the welcome refreshment, and when even the pretty Gretchen’s graceful offers of hospitality were at length declined, the Pilgrim, always the first to recover self-possession, expressed in acceptable terms, and in the name of his companions as well as his own, “the honour they felt it to be received under the roof of one whose fame had reached unto their distant homes.”

"Ay, my masters, light straws are wafted easily by every wind ; not that I would disparage my cause or my companions."

"And do they, Werner of the Melchthal, and Stauffacher, still live ?" asked the Minstrel.

"Alas, no ; the feeblest link of the three-fold cord yet hangs on, though the stouter threads are snapped."

The young bard arose, and placing one knee on the ground, took the hand of the elder and said, yet with blushing diffidence,—

"My father, if the request be not too bold, how gladly should we hear from your lips some particulars of the glorious emancipation of your country from the Tyrant's power ! I well remember that the story of William Tell stirred my first desire for song ; and the history of the brave liberators of their country awoke the first throb for liberty ; and yet my boyish dreams scarcely pictured such happiness as I now enjoy."

The request of the young enthusiast having been warmly seconded by the rest of the party, Furst waited for no further pressing, well knowing that his son-in-law must yet be absent some time, and willing to do all in his power to amuse the guests till his return. He then began his narrative, and, from the clear arrangement of its parts, it was evident it was not the first time he had been called on to relate it.

"At the death of the Emperor Rudolph, justly termed 'the Great,' you doubtless know that his son Albert succeeded to his domains, but not to his virtues. Proud, haughty, rapacious, cruel : in the midst of his luxury, abundance and power, he envied the poor Swiss mountaineers their freedom and their frugal homes—"

But we do not intend to follow the narrator through the windings of his story, since our readers have doubtless traced them through some of the various histories of the period. Yet they will believe how breathlessly the hero's tale was listened to in days when there were no telegrams propelled from port to port ; when there were no newspapers, few books and fewer readers ; and when intelligence the most important

was often learnt from disbanded mercenaries, travelling pedlars, and Minnesingers. The Elder related the cruelties of Albert's emissaries with the force of truth, and its simplicity; exciting to the highest pitch the sympathy and indignation of his hearers; but when he proceeded to the episode of Tell, and they were given to understand that they were actually under the roof of the hero of this romantic tale, their delight and surprise were unbounded.

Though an equal sharer in the former, the Pilgrim declared he felt no astonishment at learning the name of his host, as he had guessed his identity from the moment they had met on the mountain: "For who else," he asked, "could take so sure an aim? Who but Guillaume Tell could look, speak, and act as he did?" And there was a deep pathos in the speaker's voice as he asked the question.

Thus did the converse continue with unabated interest long past the supper-hour. The faggots continued to blaze, and the savoury contents of the pots went boiling on; the wheels went round, though the merry voices were somewhat lower; whilst the little girl had slid unnoticed from her great-grandfather's knee, and was sleeping across poor Bruno's neck, who seemed afraid to move even one of his long ears, lest he should disturb his slumbering charge.

At length the master returned, with many apologies for his long delay, and gentle chidings that the supper should have been kept on his account.

"And Elric, husband?" kindly inquired Margaret.

"I left him at rest and free from pain. But more of this anon; our business now is to expedite the supper; our guests must be weary and famished."

"Not so," they all declared; they had been too much interested and amused to think either of hunger or sleep."

"Here, however, the supper comes at last; and our people wait for the guests to take their seats."

The travellers having protested against doing so at a separate table, they occupied the seats of honour at the top of the long board in the centre of the hall; which was presided over

by the venerable grandsire, and soon filled by his children and dependents. Tell sat at the bottom. His two pretty daughters waited on the guests; and the mistress still kept her post near the fire, to superintend the serving of the food with her nimble handmaids. The Swiss seem to have made but little change in the culinary department since the distant period when their heroes presided over their still hospitable board; for then, as now, were served the milk-soup thickened with maize, and the salted sausages, boiled pork and kale; the fish from the lake, the roasted chamois, and the immense patties or *gateaux*, so called, stuck with dried plums. There were many more home concoctions, and sundry kinds of wild fowl—But our bill of fare is long enough; for here, with the dessert of apples and nuts, comes a little stranger in swaddling clothes to receive the grandsire's blessing. A great event had taken place in Tell's absence—the birth of his son's first boy; and the young mother had been especially desirous that he might be introduced to the strangers.

“God be wi' thee, my boy!” said Tell, laying his hand solemnly on the tiny head, as he returned the babe into its father's hands. “May'st thou be as affectionate and loving a son as thy father has been to me—and, oh! may he never be called to the same straits on thy account.” Then addressing the Pilgrim, he said, “Thou wert pleased to urge me to crave a boon. Wilt thou stand sponsor for our last-born?”

“Gladly; and he shall bear my name.”

“And that name?”

“Thou shalt hear it at the font.”

Tell conducted his guests himself to the guest-chamber—a spacious room, with a hearth almost as large, and quite as blazing, as the one below. The beds, of which there was one in each corner, were furnished with a mattress of the elastic dried leaves of the maize, and a covering lined with the down of the Eider duck. What can these our days of wonders and luxuries produce more sleep-inviting? But before our travellers yielded to their influence, they eagerly sought an explanation of some words which had dropped from their host,

relative to the Franciscan Friar, and received from the Pilgrim a promise of a full explanation on the morrow.

"At present," he said, "I am sure I should fall asleep in the midst."

More probably, it was the fear that the narrative would prove too powerful a stimulant, even against the narcotic influences of fatigue and watching, that induced him to defer the confidence. After this wise precaution, we need not say the travellers slept soundly; nor need we stop to relate the surprise and burning indignation of the two younger on hearing the history of the Devil's Bridge, and the perils encountered by their companion, who had some difficulty in persuading them to defer their search of the miscreant until after breakfast. The plentiful morning meal differed little from the evening's supper, excepting in not being so numerously attended, all the household, with the exception of the elders, having broken their fast long before, and gone to their out-of-door labours. The conversation was in consequence more unrestrained, and after the few courteous greetings and inquiries of civilized life in all ages and countries, it fell on the narrative which had so engrossed the attention of the strangers on the night before.

"Did any of Albert's *murderers*—by my faith, after what I have heard, I would rather call them *executioners*—"

"Whist! whist! young sir," hastily interrupted the Pilgrim. "Are you setting up for the defence of regicide? But pardon the interruption; ask your question."

"It is," said the Pedlar, a little abashed, "whether those unfortunate—ay, and I allow guilty—men sought refuge amongst the Swiss?—*they* at least benefited by their crime."

"They did. Our country, as the nearest both in race and tongue, was the first in which they sought a refuge, and it was denied. We knew at first only the crimson fact, but have since learnt the bitter provocation which hurried the injured to the deed."

"But could not justify it," said the Pilgrim.

Furst looked anxiously at his son-in-law, and then, either

to change the subject or from some hidden connexion with it, observed that he had omitted to give them the promised intelligence of the sick Goatherd.

“I found him,” replied Tell, “in sore distress of mind and body. He had been constantly inquiring if I were returned, as he could not, he said, die in peace unless I came back to perform a long-promised service which no one else—so he opined—could execute for him. That service, which I will not now explain, was attended, in his weak state, with much pain and difficulty; but he bore it well and seemed so content at having accomplished his heart’s long desire, that I left him at rest—I may say, happy. But we forget, father, that our guests know naught of poor Elric.”

“Do not let that stop your communings? Who is this Elric?”

“Nay, that I cannot answer you, sir Palmer,” interrupted the Elder, evidently to spare Tell’s embarrassment. “All we know is that he came into these parts so long ago as the year of grace 1308.”

“The year of the Emperor’s murder,” observed the Pilgrim, thoughtfully.

“The same; no free-born Swiss will ever forget that date.”

“Or minstrel cease to sing it.”

A glance from his older friend cut short the eloquence of the Bard; and Furst continued, whilst he looked at him with paternal affection,—

“In that ever-memorable year, Elric—for that was the only name he answered to amongst us—knocked, on a dark and stormy night, at old Rudvic’s door, the owner of a small plot of ground, on which he grazes a few score goats, and asked for service as a goatherd. The old couple had just lost the prop of their age, an only son, and always affirmed the stranger was sent by Heaven to fill his place. They took him in, promised him shelter and secrecy, bestowed on him the name of their lost son, and almost an equal portion of their love. Faithfully and affectionately did the adopted wanderer serve the aged pair; and when the old man died, he gave his widow

and all his little belongings into Elric's charge. Last winter was a very hard one in these parts; and in searching for some strayed goats beneath the snow, the faithful Elric caught a fever and has been sinking ever since, and now, in all likelihood, he has not many days to live."

"Say rather hours," said Tell, who had been struggling to command his emotion during his father's narrative—"nay minutes; wherefore I must again crave pardon of my guests for leaving them. I promised the dying man I would return and bring you, father, with me."

"May I not accompany you—at least to the door?" whispered a soft voice in Tell's ear.

"Willingly, my young master, and enter it too. The sight will do you good. You may learn a lesson at that humble pallet which your gentle heart will feel and never forget."

"Then, why may we not all go?" pleaded the Pilgrim; "for who is there amongst us that does not need instruction?"

After half an hour's walk, the party reached a small platform on the mountain's side, on which stood the Goatherd's hut, surrounded by a little green pasturage. All was still, save the rushing of a mountain stream, which might be traced like a silver thread, from above, as it issued from a dark fissure of the rock, and rolled over its surface. It had been diverted from its course, to minister to the simple wants of the inhabitants of the cottage. The plaintive cry of a goat was also discernible; the animal was standing before the door and occasionally butting against it, as if to demand entrance. Tell stroked the creature's head, saying gently,—

"Ah, my poor Nänchen, thy master will never caress thee more."

The outer room of the humble dwelling into which Tell introduced his party was unoccupied; but sobs and plaintive lamentations were distinctly heard by them to issue from the one within. The hero stood for a few moments irresolute and struggling with his feelings; then, mastering them by one visible effort, laid his hand on the latch, raised it, and threw

open the door. What an unexpected sight met the eyes of his followers!

On a low pallet facing the opened door, lay—not, as they were prepared to see, the dying Goatherd,* but—a strangely anomalous yet majestic figure, arrayed in the bright armour of a knight; his visor up, his gauntleted hands crossed on his breast, his sword laid at his side. At his head knelt the old peasant woman, her hands clasped and her streaming eyes raised to his countenance. The light of a lamp hung above the bed, dim and uncertain, yet, as it fell on that calm countenance, on those finely-moulded features, on the kneeling figure at the side, it gave to the whole scene the similitude of a Gothic monument, lighted by the rays of a setting sun struggling through the dim panes of a cathedral window. The illusion was yet further heightened as Tell, bending reverentially over the calm outstretched form of the caparisoned knight, seemed thus to read his epitaph:—

“My father, my friends, you see before you the mortal remains of the noble but unfortunate

“WALTER, BARON VON ESCHENBACH.

“May the blood of his all-forgiving Redeemer assoul his soul!”

A low-breathed yet fervent “Amen” from all present was the solemn response.

As the party walked slowly homeward, Tell gave the following additional explanation of the impressive scene which occupied all hearts and thoughts:—

“My father has already explained to you the honourable yet stern motives which induced the Swiss to refuse protection, and even shelter, to the murderers of the cruel Emperor Albert, although he had ever been their most inveterate foe, and they had at that time thrown off his galling yoke. To this stern justice the poor Goatherd and his wife offered a merciful exception. One dark stormy night, the blood-hound on his

* Historical.

track, faint with terror and remorse, famishing, and almost death-weary, the Baron von Eschenbach, clothed in the shining armour in which he sat at a monarch's feast, and armed with the weapon that had drunk that monarch's blood, stooped his lofty head to ask shelter beneath the mountain châlet. You have already heard how generously it was accorded, and how gratefully repaid. Before he doffed his coat-of-mail he claimed the promise of his host that, in case of his death, it should be placed on his body, and that he should be buried in this strange winding-sheet. The old people promised secrecy, and kept their word until just before the old man's death, when the secret and the trust devolved on me. With his confidence the Baron generously gave me his friendship, which of late years has been the greatest charm of my life. How many a snow-storm have I braved, how many a night have I passed over the smouldering embers of poor Gotlobe's fire, talking of deeds of prowess, of acts of tyranny and oppression, and"—

The hand of Furst laid on the shoulder of the speaker prevented his continuing.

"Nay, my son," said the old man mildly, "I blame not thy love for thy friend, nor thy anger at his injuries; but, remember, he forgave them, and so do thou."

Tell bore the reproof with childlike humility, and continued his narrative:—

"On my return yesternight, you all know I was summoned to the Goatherd's hut. I found life almost extinct; but when I had enclosed the shrunk frame in its once untarnished covering, a bright gleam shot from the expiring embers. Pressing my hand as I clasped the last buckle, he lifted his eyes heavenward, and the name of the Pardoner and Expiator of all sin passed his lips, on which, as ye have seen, a sweet smile lingered."

That evening the wheels went noiselessly round in the Swiss kitchen, and a shade of melancholy passed over the usually joyous circle. The Minstrel tuned his harp to lays of sorrow and regret, the Liberator spoke of change and decay, and the lost companions of his deathless deeds; and, as each

in turn contributed to the interest of the passing hour, the same strain of pleasing melancholy pervaded all their communications.

Delighted with the attractions of their Swiss sojourn, the travellers yielded to Tell's pressing hospitality, and remained his guests for some days. During that time, they attended the obsequies of poor Elric ; for by that name he was committed to his humble grave. The secret of his birth was confined to those who witnessed the last affecting disclosure of its tarnished nobility.

All that liberality and kindness could do to soothe the grief of the outlaw's humble benefactress was supplied and administered during the short period of her remaining life. One month only elapsed ere she was laid, at her dying request, beside her adopted son.

The Pilgrim performed his promise of standing sponsor for Tell's infant grandson, and he yielded to the remonstrances of his friends in allowing a strict search to be made both for the recreant Friar and the stolen pack. Of the last, the owner was so fortunate as to be enabled to redeem some valuable articles, which had been sold at an inadequate price to the cottagers around ; and he failed not to distribute them amongst the fair *spinsters*, as a balance to the heart-subduing effect of the Minstrel's songs of love and war. Of the result of the other search we shall probably hear at a more advanced period of our story.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ABBEY CONFESSORIAL.

Talk not of beasts of prey, of coiling snake,
That lurk in beds of flowers and tangled brake :
The deadliest enemy of Man is Man.

We return to Koenigsfelden, again to find the restless Archduke Leopold (whose uncontrolled passions and disordered imagination allowed him little repose), spurring his fleet steed over the plain and through the deep forest-paths which lay between the Castle and the Abbey. Vehemently desiring one day what his conscience often bade him eschew on the next, he came in hot haste to forbid the prosecution of a project which would doubtless be “better honoured in the breach than in the observance;” but forgetting that sufficient time had elapsed for its completion, and that he had to do with one to whom reflection came before, not after, action.

Pushing aside the cowed attendants who would guard the *sanctum* of their superior, even from royal intrusion, Leopold presented himself before the Abbot of Koenigsfelden.

“My lord,” he said, “there are straits which dispense with ceremony. Hast thou tidings of thy mute emissary? None! I marvel that thou, with all thy senses so alert, should’st employ one who lacks two of the five.”

“It is that I employ servants, not to speak or to hear, but to *do*. My business wanted no qualifications but such as Gotfried possessed—punctuality and fidelity.”

“In one of which, at least, he has been found wanting: he should have returned ere this.”

“And therefore I feel sure some mischance has befallen him, and I have despatched one of our brethren to the Prior of St. Gothard, who haply may give us some intelligence of him. But why is your Highness thus disquieted?”

"I am not without misgivings as to the share I have taken in your somewhat hazardous, and certainly questionable enterprise," replied Leopold sulkily.

"*My* enterprise! Nay, your Highness dreams in calling it such, since you know by whose orders I acted; you know also that those orders were, if possible, to *detain*, but not to *injure* the object of them. Nay, nay, you cannot forget your cordial assent to the means proposed for accomplishing his Holiness's wishes."

The eye of Leopold shrank from the calm gaze of the Abbot as he continued,—

"Your Highness knows better than I how the detention of an enemy for so short a period *could* be of avail. It was my duty to obey, not to question, the orders of my superior, even though they fell not in with my humour. I know not the turbulent Prince, and like not his report; yet, as far as I am concerned, I would not that a hair of his head should needlessly fall from it."

A bitter smile curled the Duke's lip.

"Since when," he asked, "has my Lord Abbot been so careful over that harebrained head?"

"Mayhap it is since I have found out its owner has a rival who would be yet more distasteful to your Highness. For myself, although I again repeat that I know not, nay, have never seen him whom men begin to call the King of Bohemia, there breathes not a prince whom I would not sooner see the consort of the Princess Bertha."

"I prithee explain," said the Duke, who had given little attention to the latter part of the Abbot's speech. "Whom meanest thou as John of Luxemburg's rival? Didst thou learn his name from my brother?"

"It matters not through what channel I learnt the distasteful fact, but *fact* it is, that before Louis opened the prison-door of your royal brother, he demanded the hand of his already-affianced daughter—ay, that of the Princess Bertha, your niece."

"It is a lie!" exclaimed Leopold—"a base, unfounded lie;

and had any tongue but thine, Abbot, uttered it, I would have crammed it down the perjured throat."

"And that tongue repeats the unwelcome truth," said the Abbot, with proud composure, his calm eye still resting on the abashed Prince, who said in a subdued tone,—

"I crave your pardon, father, for my hasty judgment, but my brain is on fire. Events so unexpected, so adverse, crowd on me in such force that my reason totters. Even now, I forget some question of weight that I came purposely to have solved."

"Collect yourself, my son," said the Abbot soothingly. "Perhaps it related to the expected arrival of the ambassador from Naples? and," he added, as though he rather asked the question of himself than of the Duke, "perhaps it was to afford time to the more favoured suitor that his Holiness was so desirous to arrest the betrothed applicant on his way?"

The Duke answered impatiently, "I would fain barter queries; for I can guess little, and know nothing. What didst thou hint of the arrogant pretensions of the son of Louis, father?"

"I did not hint; I affirmed."

Leopold drew a heavy sigh.

"This, then," he said, "is poor Frederick's secret! Reverend father, I now perceive that, whilst endeavouring to escape a storm at sea, we risk a shipwreck on shore. I would I had let the winds and the waves do their own bidding ere I had meddled in the whirlwind. To remove one odious pretender would but make room for another yet more objectionable. I now see no way of escape, unless the maiden, like her aunt, whom in what is good she resembles, would declare for the cloister. Speak, father!"

The last words were uttered with petulant impatience.

"What would you have me say, my son, to a proposition so utterly futile, which neither the Princess nor her sire would give ear to for one moment? *You*, however, praised be our Lady, have nobler views of the claims of the Church; and

THE PRIOR OF THE HAWK.

"I have but blessed you with two fair daughters: cannot you
find her but the girl?"

"No, reverend brother: the sisters would pine in separa-
tion."

"Nay, then, the offering will be yet more acceptable if
undivided."

"Father, father, thou knowest not the yearnings of a
parent's heart. And, even if I could make the costly sacrifice,
my children have no vocation for the veil, and I have sworn—
and, by the light of my Lady's brow, I will observe mine oath
—never to drag them unwillingly to the altar. No; rather let
me writhes for ever in the hot fires of purgatory than seek to
quench their fury by tears wrung from my children's eyes."

"Be calm, my son; Heaven will find some other way of
attribution."

At that moment a lay brother entered the apartment, and
delivered his message to his superior in a low voice, but not
low enough to escape the morbid vigilance of Leopold.

"St. Gothard! comes the messenger from St. Gothard? Bid
him here—bid him here, I say?"

The trembling friar looked at the Abbot. There was no help
for it, and he therefore, apparently without reluctance, reit-
erated the Archduke's commands, and Brother Everard soon
appeared—a man of commanding deportment and pleasing
physiognomy.

"Benedicite, good brother," said the Abbot; then turning
to Leopold, added, "Your Highness, this is the trusty mes-
senger I spoke of just now. What news, Brother Everard?"

The friar took a small packet from his bosom, and presented
it to the Abbot, saying,—

"His reverence the Prior sends this in answer to your
lordship's letter, and with it bade me assure you of his love
and service."

As the Abbot was engaged in the perusal of his brother
prelate's despatch, Leopold turned impatiently to demand,
"what news the messenger had brought of Gotfried?"

"The Prior and monks, your Highness, affirm that he arrived

one eve at their Hospice, and left it the next morning with a Pilgrim, to whom, they further informed me, he acted as guide. I staid therefore only for needful refreshment and the Prior's despatch, and wended my way down the steep I had climbed."

"Found'st thou no trace of thy dumb brother on thy way down the mountain?"

"But little, your Highness, though I failed not diligently to seek it. One little maiden told me she had served a pilgrim with milk, who had rewarded her with a larger piece of silver than had ever crossed her palm before."

"Ha! and say, good brother," asked the Duke, whilst the Abbot raised his eyes from the letter he held, "did not the wench notice his companion?"

"She did; but *he* found not the same favour in her eyes, for she remarked, albeit his garb, she wished the gracious pilgrim had found a comelier mate. The grateful lass followed them until they got near unto the Teufel's Thal, and then went back—"

"Fearing, I suppose," interrupted the Abbot, with unusual facetiousness, "that the foul fiend should arrest her for intruding into his domains. Now go, brother, and get the refreshment thou must greatly need."

"Nay, stay!" vehemently exclaimed Leopold, holding the retreating friar by his sleeve. "That valley on which the curse of desolation rests borders the fearful bridge that spans the torrent. Did the maiden venture thus far?"

"Not at first, your Highness; but, fancying on her homeward way she heard a cry of distress—or rather, as she expressed it, 'a signal of danger'—"

"The demon's howl, doubtless."

"Nay, reverend father, these jests are at the best ill-timed. Go on, good brother. The maiden crossed the bridge, saidst thou, and found—?"

"Naught but a pilgrim's staff, and an arrow stained with blood, which she opined—"

The narrator stopped; for at that moment he caught the eye of his superior, who with his usual calm determination pointed

to the door. He had observed the rising fury gleam from Leopold's eye, had marked the mounting blood swell the veins of his high bare forehead, and cared not that any one but himself should witness its explosion. The enraged Prince paced the apartment with unequal strides; then suddenly stopping before the Abbot, he exclaimed,—

“ My Lord of Koenigsfelden, I now preceive thy cursed plot! I now see how thou hast betrayed and ruined me—dragged me, soul and body, into the lowest pit of hell, by making me a partaker in the foulest murder that ever drove man to perdition. Thou hast lured, by thy cursed agent, the noble and mighty into thy meshes, and hurled him into an ignominious grave. I swear by the Holy Rood that, but for thy priestly office, I would crush thee as the reptile that crawls from its covert to sting the unwary! ”

And the frantic man as he spoke shook his closed hand in the Abbot's face. The stately Dignitary blenched not, neither did he betray the slightest emotion of anger or fear. He rose slowly and steadily, and taking a crucifix from his bosom, held it aloft, describing the sign of the cross as he repeated solemnly,—

“ By this holy emblem, by this sacred sign, and in virtue of my ministerial office, I exorcise the evil spirit which has taken possession of my well-beloved yet unfortunate son, and infused the poison of suspicion into his noble soul.” Then, after a short pause, he added, “ When the Archduke Leopold comes to his right mind, he shall hear that the object of his mistrustful suspicion lives, and, mayhap, ere many suns arise and set, may come hither to advance claims he will be in no haste to ratify.”

Whether from the effect of the exorcism or the dispersion of his fears, the charm worked effectively. The tiger was subdued.

“ Forgive me and pity me, Francesco de Montolivo!” he said, in accents of sorrowful entreaty. “ Thou seest before thee the most wretched of God's creatures—the outcast of Nature, the sport of Fortune, torn by a thousand demons. Oh, father, father, speak to them, exorcise them!”

And the priest did exorcise the foul fiends which had taken possession of the half-maniac's mind, by gentle words and soothing promises; and dismissed him with deep pity for his mad infatuation. The wise man—for such he was deemed by himself and the world at large—then yielded himself up to a possession equally unreasonable. He touched a little bell of summons.

“Bid Brother Everard hither.”

The recalled messenger soon appeared.

“The presence of the Prince prevented my making all the inquiries I wished,” said the superior on his entrance. “I find from the Prior’s letter that one of the guides, on returning to Bellinzona, had called at the hospital to report the safety of the Pilgrim, but he gives no further particulars. *You* spoke of the little mountain maid’s finding a blood-stained arrow; it is therefore plain that, if aimed at the Pilgrim, it missed its mark. What deemest thou: could Gotfried have been its victim? I like not his disappearance without notice or token. Brother, thou must depart again on the quest.”

The addressed bowed, placed his hand on his breast, and would have left the room, but the Abbot detained him.

“Stay one moment! My esteemed brother’s letter is kind, but laconic. I would fain learn from you any chance talk thou may’st have heard anent the Friar and his companion.”

“I do remember but little beside what I have already mentioned,” answered the friar hesitatingly.

“Ponder well; I am not in haste. Did the monks?—ah! I see there *is* something.”

“The Cellarer, my lord—”

“Yes; the Cellarer? Let there be no concealment between us.”

“I would not peril the good Cellarer.”

“Neither shalt thou. Brother Everard, when didst thou know thy spiritual father betray a confidence or forfeit his word?”

“Never, never, my respected lord;” and the friar raised the hem of the Abbot’s robe to his forehead with genuine love

and reverence. "Thus graciously commanded, I will obey. But I speak only, as my informant did, on surmise, or rather from some information whose source he did not reveal. He, however, hinted that—"

"Gotfried?"

The friar bowed, and continued, "Meant no good towards the Pilgrim; that after he had retired to his chamber"— the narrator's voice lowered to a whisper as he added—"but for timely interruption he would have—"

"Enough, enough! good son. God be praised that no harm has fallen on the stranger, as I feel sure no harm was intended. Perchance, honest Gotfried mistook the stranger's chamber for his own, or wandered in his sleep. Thou knowest he has no tongue to ask his way, or sense of sound to break his slumber."

Poor Brother Everard felt his imprudence; perhaps the Abbot guessed his fears; but he was too generous to resent a confidence he had exacted, and said kindly,—

"Although I set small store by thy gossip, neither thou nor thy friend shall hear aught again of it. But thou must depart in search of poor Gotfried, and bring him back if thou canst find him. St. Francis forfend that evil befall him!"

Brother Everard crossed himself, and silently awaited the further commands of his superior, which were thus graciously issued:—

"Now, fare thee well, my son. Thou hast ever shown thyself so trusty and diligent that I would fain, when opportunity occurs, appoint thee to an office of higher trust. That of our aged Sacristan must soon be vacant."

The friar placed his hand on his heart, bowed low, and retired, with a charge to send Father Anselmo.

A business of somewhat ludicrous, though nevertheless mortifying and perplexing, character had induced this Lord Abbot of a royal abbey, and cardinal expectant to summon this member of his community, who, though little deserving either respect or favour, was nevertheless one of the *littles* out of which our spiritual diplomatist formed his *mickle*—

one grain of the sandhill on which he meant to mount to eminence. This Minorite friar, whose conventional name was Father Anselmo, and office confessor and spiritual director of the novices, filled a situation, if not exactly adapted to his mean understanding and grovelling spirit, was eminently calculated to feed his inordinate curiosity and love of interference. It had another value in his estimation: it often threw him in the way of Sister Eva, and afforded them delicious morsels of gossip and criticism to chew together. The peculiar relation this unworthy confessor bore to one of the most important sections of a female community caused him to be an object of especial interest to a new Prior, whose introduction and history we shall have more to say of hereafter.

But the summoned confidant waits for his instructions. Confidant? No; the Abbot Montolivo had no confidants. He was the sun of his own system, and he cared not how dim his revolving planets were, provided he entirely governed their movements. Thus the opaque Gotfried, and the eccentric Anselmo were alike subject to his laws, and ruled by his influence. So quickly and noiselessly had the latter appeared, that he stood before his summoner as if he had started up through the floor at the stroke of a necromancer's wand. A little sordid old man, whose twinkling black eyes had been so long bent on *littles* that they nearly approached his nose; whilst that, in its turn, overshadowed his thin lips. His complexion was tawny, his beard thin and grizzly, and his voice high-set and wiry.

“What is the meaning of this story of St. Klare's new petticoat?” demanded the Abbot.

“A miracle, my lord, a *bond fide* miracle! I marvel much your reverence has had no revelation, natural or spiritual, of this mark of the favour of St. Klare, *Laus Domino!* to our sister Minorites.”

“But this red silk petticoat, father?”

“I crave pardon; not silk, but velvet of the true woof of Genoa. And once again I would ask permission to intimate

that the colour thereof is not red, but green ; and the form—but I fear to offend by further liberty of remark—”

“ Nay, go on, go on ; I ask for information,” said the listener, who let this stringer of little exceptions proceed, watching in the meanwhile to pick up any stray bead he might let slip between his fingers.

“ What other blunder have I made ? ”

“ Only in the form of the miraculous garment ; that being not a petticoat, but a vest or tunic ; such as our Princess Bertha,—that is, without any special reference to her Highness—any grand lady might don on occasions of state.”

The Abbot did not inquire since when the meddling friar had gained his experience in sumptuary etiquette ; nor did that worthy notice the conclusion at which the superior jumped by his next question.

“ How fares it with the sick tire-woman ? Hast thou shrived her during her sickness ? ”

“ No ; the wench’s mind has wandered, and the Leech commands entire repose.”

“ Does he opine her estate dangerous ? ”

“ As such he named it to me when I proposed her removal to the hospital, unless, he said, he could procure the concoction of a far-renowned antidote, which—”

“ *Antidote ?* ” repeated the superior with emphasis. “ Dost thou know the portent of the word, Father Anselmo ? Dost thou know that an antidote is not needed where poison is not feared ? ”

“ St. Francis forfend ! ” and the little black eyes twinkled like coruscations. “ I humbly confess my blunder. I meant, not antidote, but remedy. What know I of pharmacy ? My vocation, as thou well knowest, reverend father, is with the soul, not the body.”

“ True ; and therefore thou mayest retire. Seek, I pray thee, the Leech without delay, and send him hither. One word ere you go. Does the Abbess know aught of this notable miracle ? ”

“ The Abbess, reverend father ? and how in the name of

blessed St. Klare should she not, when doubtless the saint worked it for the honour of herself and her rule? My lady Abbess not know? when she has set forth her intention of giving the nuns a grand refection on St. Klare's *fête* day, and has invited her royal nieces from the Castle to partake of it? Moreover, she has bidden the whole royal party, and many more, noble and simple, to join the especial services of the Church on the grand occasion."

"Enough, good Anselmo. I would see the Leech. Farewell."

Whilst waiting the arrival of Dr. Baumgarten, the Abbot had leisure to reflect on the revelations of his last *little*, and he did so with peculiar regret and mortification. It was not that alone the glaring imposition of the pretended miracle that raised these feelings; for (although utterly repugnant to his refined taste and advanced judgment) he had sometimes prudently winked at certain so-called marvellous visions, mysteriously-imprinted stigmata, or miraculous findings of missing articles, as a harmless pastime and healthy stimulant for the grown-up and grown-old children under his care—but when, as here, such exhibitions exceeded the conventional bounds, he felt the dignity of the Church was at stake. Moreover, this glaring imposture of Sister Eva's was mixed up with one from whose penetrating integrity he would most especially conceal any attempt at imposition. Would the Princess Bertha quietly submit to the abduction of her tire-woman? With these reflections came an inlet of yet darker suspicions.

"I see how it is," said the muser. "If I cannot succeed in suppressing this mummery, the life of the unhappy dupe will be sacrificed—dead men tell no tales—and, what is yet worse, the honour of the Church will be stained. But where is the Leech?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE MERRY MASKERS.

All the world's a stage,
And one man in his time plays many parts.

Yes, most sententious Jaques! the world *is* a stage, and yet thou and thy unapproached Shakespeare have rightly compressed the vast multitudes of all ages, countries, and degrees who acted their parts on it, within the compass of seven short stages. Where, but in one other Book, do we find a truth so comprehensive and so sad? and where, but in that other Book, can we seek consolation in contemplating the deep pathos of the closing strain, wherein

“The last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion”?

But *our* curtain rises, and we must repair to the Prompter's box.

Notwithstanding the magic powers of steam were unknown to our forefathers, they possessed a machine whose wheels and pulleys, formed of human bones and sinews, produced on sundry occasions as momentous effects. Through the agency of this mighty machine of *Feudalism*, the Castle of Hapsburg was speedily and completely metamorphosed. Beacon-fires from a hundred hills announced the return of a justly-beloved Prince. The good tidings were likewise sped by horsemen on foaming steeds from town to town, and echoed in merry peals from every tower, to receive a joyous response from loyal hearts. Hospitality was liberally proffered to all. Banquets, masks, revellings, were proclaimed far and wide; whilst diplomatic meetings were secretly organized under the cover of outward hilarity.

The festivities commenced with a late banquet, which, were we not aiming a little at mediæval nomenclature, we might have called a supper. The table, stretched to the full extent of the hall, almost bent, massive as it was, beneath the cheer provided for the bidden guests. We will not present our readers with a bill of fare, or indulge in a minute description of the costumes of the participants, since our almost equally fascinating writers of historical romance, and romantic history have taxed their powers of description to bring us acquainted with the wardrobes, cellars, and even butteries of our fore-gones; inasmuch as it would be deemed as unfashionable nowadays to be ignorant of our ancestors' household affairs as to know anything of our own. Our dressmakers and milliners, too, have gone beyond this, and have stolen the patterns of the costumes of mediæval belles of all periods, and thus spared authors all the trouble of research on that head.

Assuming therefore, with all these helps, that our readers have pictured to themselves a convivial meeting appropriate to the early part of the fourteenth century, it remains to be told that the personal retainers of the numerous visitors, their squires and pages, being accommodated in another room, the royal brothers mixed familiarly with the guests, and that, in order to facilitate this, the Archdukes Leopold and Albert presided on either side of the table, whilst Frederick was seated on a somewhat elevated dais at the higher end. Around the elder Archduke were several unoccupied seats; but although the savoury steam arose from the dishes—covers being then but little used—the company waited until the Lord Abbot had pronounced a blessing on them.

At this crisis of hungry expectation, all eyes were suddenly attracted to a side-door, from whence proceeded a numerous and brilliant party, headed by a lady on the shady side of youth, yet finely formed and of noble demeanour. Two young sylph-like figure in somewhat fanciful costume bore her train; and she was followed by a graceful girl richly habited,

whose countenance was partially shaded by a veil of light material which floated round it. Several other figures filled up the group, attendants apparently on the principal personage; and the fair procession was closed by one whose habit of a Novice contrasted artistically with the splendour and gaiety of her companions.

The reserved seats proving insufficient, some of the supernumeraries were accommodated with others near the Archdukes Leopold and Albert, both of whom entered with playful interest into the assumed characters of the merry maskers.

But curiosity itself at length gave place to a more unfortunate claimant; and substantial as the viands were, they speedily disappeared before the vigorous onset of hunger. Its edge blunted by more solid fare, the delicacies of kids and lambs roasted whole, grim heads of boars bristled with cloves, the royal peacock in full length of tail, and such like fragile dainties followed; whilst to each guest of high degree were served up smaller birds strung on silver skewers, not more than half a dozen in a row, and none larger than a pigeon or a moorcock.

But all earthly joys must have an end, and all mortal labours rest. The contest was long and stubborn between masticating powers—of which we in these degenerate times do not dream—and the viands they had to cope with, until the most valiant trencherman, like the boy at the school-treat who cried because he could not eat any more cake, gave up with a sigh of repletion. The wine-cup next circulated gaily, and the jar of voices and trenchers, to which the tread of the stout booted serving men kept up a running accompaniment, was hushed, as Leopold called on the herald to give out the toasts. Removing at the same time to the bottom of the table, in order to approach the more convivial portion of the guests, his seat was taken by the ejected president, Father Francesco, known better to our readers as the Abbot of Koenigsfelden.”

“ Does not this din and glare of mundane pleasure dazzle

and distress thee, daughter?" he asked, addressing the Novice, by whom he had taken his seat.

"My eyes are beginning to recover from the first blinding effect, reverend father, and to find pleasure in what is so strange and enlivening."

This reply was evidently received with unpleasant surprise by the priest, who gravely replied,—

"I am grieved, my daughter, to hear thee make so unseemly a confession. The object for which, in thy case, the convent grating was removed was to show thee the hollowness of worldly allurements, not to attract thee by their glitter."

The answer of the accused was inaudible by reason of the bustle attendant on the entrance of a band of rustic musicians, who, at the Duke's command, were conducted to the upper part of the hall, and the wine-cup pressed on their acceptance. Habited in the holiday costume of the alpine shepherd, with their short pipe or reed in their hand, they modestly offered their humble help to the festivity of the *fête*; and, though their rustic appearance made little pretension to musical skill, their offer was graciously accepted, and a position assigned them near the dais. Whether from accident or design, the grouping of the band was picturesque—almost, to use a modern phrase, artistic. Two or three of the party, of loftier stature, clad as chamois-hunters, and armed with bow and quiver, stood in the middle; whilst a young man in minstrel guise stood a little in advance, leaning over a classically-constructed harp, from which he drew a few accompanying chords, as he led the following

MADRIGAL.

"From snow-clad hills, whose barren soil
A scanty pittance yields;
We wandering Savoyards are come
To glean your fertile fields.
Oh, grant us but the refuse, then
May Heaven the gift o'erpay!
And we will cheat your weary toil
With our sweet roundelay,
Roundelay, roundelay.

No certain place our dwelling knows,
Our cells no harvests fill ;
The reckless avalanche threatens those ;
These, ceaseless winters chill.
But what though snows eternal reign,
And storms our hearts dismay,
Our gratitude is ever-warm,
And sweet our roundelay,
Roundelay, roundelay."

Cordial applause at its conclusion, and the yet more flattering tribute of profound attention during its performance, rewarded the masterly execution of this madrigal ; but the judicious commendations of his brothers were overpowered by Leopold's imperious call for hunting choruses, battle songs and the like ; which were given in quick succession, until Albert—fearing the powerful stimulus might elicit a premature development of feelings not yet matured for action—interfered to crave a temporary cessation for the exhausted musicians, and excited hearers.

"When Music, heavenly maid, was young," as at the times of which we write, her influence was more potent, her spell more magical, even if her science was not so advanced as at present. Men's minds, too, were more susceptible of sudden emotions ; not so encrusted with the polish of artificial life. It is thus we read of the far greater, or at least more demonstrative, influence which music and verse exercised over the festive meetings of our rude ancestors of bygone years.

Indeed, we, whose amusements are more varied, and whose taste is more fastidious, can form but little idea of the spell-creating minstrel of the middle ages.

But our Abbot waits for an answer to inquiries which the temporary pause has enabled him to address to his companion.

"They are, I believe, reverend father, some poor Savoyards, who come yearly to assist in gathering in the harvest of our plenteous fields, in order to glean a few golden grains for their own necessity : but they have told you their history in their own sweet plaintive tones. It seems," she continued

after a short pause, “that his Highness accidentally discovered their skill as he passed by Hilda’s cave, and—”

“ *Saint Hilda thou wouldest say, daughter; but I pray thee proceed. What did the Duke discover therein?*”

“ Only, that the recluse, finding her sole companion, the nymph Echo, dull company, had called in a wandering minstrel to—”

“ Have a care, daughter, that thou trespass not on holy ground! This heedless association of the idols of paganism and a votaress of our holy Church sounds, to say the least, unseemly in one of thy sacred profession. Still, I would not closely clip the wings of thy young fancy, unless they approach to brush the horns of the altar.”

“ I am fully aware of the justice of your rebuke, holy father, and therefore would not that it should light on the guiltless;” and as the speaker uttered this she drew aside a veil which had partially concealed her face.

The Abbot’s start was natural, if not genuine, and the tone of his voice in accordance with it.

“ The Princess Bertha! I scarcely dare credit my eyes—scarcely dare believe it possible that so earnest a champion for truth should stoop to disguises.”

“ Nay, reverend father,” replied Bertha, painfully colouring, yet too indignant to exonerate herself by the history of the lost vest, “ you are not wont to censure such disguises. Even within the convent walls you sanction the representation of sacred mysteries, and permit us to assume characters far more sacred—even the holiest.”

The politic accuser, unable to confute, was fain by stern rebuke to silence the reasoner.

“ Princess of Austria,” he said, “ would that I might see thee adorned with those jewels of humility and obedience, which have ever been the crowning ornaments of the daughters of thy race! would that, emulating the odorous sanctity of thy royal aunt, or the gracious obedience of thy stepmother, thou wouldest exercise thyself in practising silence, rather than these vain questionings of the verdict of thy elders.”

Tears rushed into the eyes of the rebuked girl.

"My reverend director," she said with unaffected humility, "insomuch as you deem me wrong, you have the power of correction."

The priest was mollified, and resumed his habitually courteous tone.

"What if thy awarded penance be to continue the habit, voluntarily assumed to-night, throughout the court festivals of the next month?"

"Most willingly would I acquiesce; and I may add, this simplicity of dress would be no small convenience in our present straits; but should not the return of our beloved Prince be honoured by our brightest array? to-night we are only maskers."

"Your honoured sire, Princess, being so dutiful a son of the Church, is content to be governed by the commands of her ministers. However, my fair pupil, I wish not to curtail your taste or your adornment, knowing that in your case the last is ever under the guidance of the first. But what did you hint of straits? I trust, the moth has not been revelling amid your braveries, reading its little lesson to those who lay up their treasure on earth?"

Bertha was sorry that the return of a page, whom the Abbot had sent to inquire the meaning of some movement amongst the highland band, prevented her using the present opportune introduction of the subject of dress, as a pretext for the mention of, not only her missing vest, but, what was more interesting, her missing attendant.

The page delivered his message with a very important air:—

"The Archduke, my Lord Abbot, is making inquiries touching the parentage of yon harper; but methinks it needs not the eye of the *hawk* to detect his borrowed plumes. I'll engage that both he and two of his company are right merry maskers."

"That ~~part~~ seems the order of the day," said the Abbot.

"The Porteress's little scholar Hans plays his part as best. But there seems some interruption to the

play. Here, Hans, run again and inquire the cause of the delay."

The delighted messenger soon returned full fraught with the desired intelligence:—

"Please you, my Lord Abbot, to note yonder stripling on the left of the comely Hunter—he who now seats himself at the harp—a fair youth, tall, but supple as a withewand, with eyes like a chamois, and—"

"Well, boy, I see him plainly; but what of him?"

"It seems his Highness had demanded of him some familiar melody; but my master, forsooth, boasts that he sings not of musical lore, but from the fancy of the moment."

"A mountain troubadour, your Highness," said the Abbot, smiling, as at this moment Frederick applied to him for a theme; "the young improvisatore should have a theme from Arcadia."

"Nay, my Lord Abbot," replied the Duke, "I should have remembered that your classic taste could scarcely cater for the bard or his hearers; it behoves us better to crave of your fair neighbour a subject that will fall in with our simple fancies."

After a minute's consideration, Bertha wrote a few words on the tablet that was offered to her, which, being conveyed to the youth, he bowed gracefully to the inspirer of his song.

In a moment the uproarious mirth of that peopled hall sank into tomb-like stillness, and even the rudest listener in it yielded himself a willing captive to the magician's spells, who, himself a captive to his art, had but to sweep his hand across the strings of his harp, than all consciousness of the presence of a listening throng vanished. He saw the scenes he sang as vividly as if they arose before his bodily eyes, and portrayed them in music and verse to his audience.

He began by a scarcely audible arpeggio, but increasing gradually in strength and tone; till the fire of inspiration illumined, and then flashed from his upturned eye—just as the evening breeze breathes gently at first over the wires of an *Æolian* harp, till, rising by degrees, it swells into a diapason of unearthly solemnity.

Perhaps the theme, so judiciously chosen by the Princess, heightened the effect of the minstrel's art both on himself and his hearers ; as the trait of heroism referred to was fresh in the memory of all, and the hero of the epic, "The Glory of Chivalry," sat amongst them in the hall of his fathers.

THE GLORY OF CHIVALRY.

"The setting sun on the Weisenthal
 Throws his golden beams afar ;
 Gleaming, Soleure, from thy grey clock-tower
 And the waves of thy guardian Aar.
 But they fall, too, alas, on the threat'ning foe,
 Gilding his banners tall,
 Encamped on the opposite bank of the stream
 That washes thy city wall.

And now the sun sinks : yet still on the snow
 He leaves for a few brief minutes a glow,
 Like the sweet summer rose, both fleeting and bright
 And soon all is dark save the stars of the night ;
 And all, too, is still, save the river and rill ;
 For the city's asleep, while her sentinels keep
 Their watch till the morn's dawning light.

Why sleep ye, why sleep ye, brave men of Soleure
 Though your river be deep, and your fortress secure,
 Yet the Glory of Chivalry's nigh.
 The Hawk's on the wing, all ready to spring,
 And blast with the glance of his eye !
 They have levelled the pine, they have dug deep the mine,
 They have worked day and night at the oar ;
 And now o'er the wide-spreading river they fling
 A bridge to the opposite shore.

Hark ! hark ! 'tis the watch-dog's bark,
 And the roar of the river I deem—
 Yet there's more than the watch-dog's bark on the breeze,
 And more than the roar of the stream !
 'Tis the many-footed tread, that sound of dread,
 Which vibrates on the ear ;
 'Tis the gathering band on the nether strand,
 Mute, cautious, drawing near.

They come ! they come ! with beat of drum,
 And with trumpet clang ing far :
 Whilst the rising sun reflects in light
 Their lances and their armour bright,
 As they cross the swelling Aar.

And brave Soleure has done its part,
For its arrows' whirring sweep
Have pierced through many a foeman's heart,
And sunk him in the deep.

And where shall the aged flee that day?
The infant, the matron, the maid?
Oh, where, but to Him who hears their cry,
And sends, in their peril, His aid.
* * * * *
Hear ye that crush, and the water's rush,
And the leaping of the wave?
And the rafters' creak, and the wild, wild shriek,
As they sink in a watery grave?

'Victory, victory, men of Soleure!
Your foemen sink in the snare
They laid for the brave and the free,
Then leave them to perish there!
Down, down with the recreant knaves!
Draw the bow, lay them low,
Sink them deeper in the waves!

'And when did Schweitzer draw his sword
Against a prostrate foe—
When did he lay a dart on string
To crush the weak and low?
"The Lord hath graciously inclined
His ear unto *our* prayers,
And shall *we* turn from our fellow-men,
Nor bend an ear to theirs?"'

They have loosed the two-handed blade from their side;
They have doffed the helmet's crested pride;
They have plunged in the wave, not to slay, but save,
And to breast the opposing tide.
Oh, hard was the strife, as the struggling for life
Clung to the rescuing hand—
And their noble deliverers' strength had failed,
But the might of love and faith prevailed,
And they drew them safe to the strand.

And here, to share in the grateful toil,
The matrons of the city sped;
Chafed the numbed limb, poured wine and oil
On wounded side and drooping head:

Whilst Soleure's fairest spread their hoard,
 And bade the rescued to the board,
 In accents kind and meek;
 E'en little children ran to bring
 Their share of welcome from the spring,
 To cheer the faint and weak.

Now rescued, comforted and fed,
 The grateful Austrians wend their way,
 With many thanks and blessings shed
 On their noble hosts that day.—
 To seek the camp, where in council grave
 Their chieftains have met to lament the brave,
 And to settle in solemn debate,
 How their loss to repair—when, lo! they are there
 Eager to tell how all befell,
 And their wondrous deliverance relate.

Then the blue eyes of Leopold brightly gleamed,
 As he lifted them on high;
 'And may Heaven recompense,' he cried,
 'The brave for their clemency!
 But away, my brave Knights, come away!
 Lay your swords and your armour aside,
 One trophy alone will we take,
 The banner of Austria's pride.'

Then he chose thirty Knights of renown,
 And together their journey they make,
 Till arrived at the walls of the town
 Thus 'the Glory of Chivalry' spake:—

'Brave men of Soleure!' (hushed, hushed was each breath
 Of the citizens gathered around,
 And the rapid Aar, as listening too,
 Flowed with a muffled sound)—
 'Brave men of Soleure! behold at your gate
 I, Leopold of Hapsburg, dutious wait,
 With the banner of peace, to bid enmity cease
 For ever betwixt you and me.
 Then a welcome I crave for me and my Knights,
 The conquerors in a thousand fights,
 Vanquished by clemency!'**

Not a breath, not a gesture of applause, followed a performance whose wonderful effect cannot be accounted for from the simple versification and inartificial melody of the Minstrel's

* Historical.

song. The listeners at its close seemed like persons just awaking from the power of a mighty spell. Tears flowed plentifully down the cheek of beauty, and unwonted sighs burst from many a mailed breast. One gently-breathed “dulcissima” was the first sound to break on the charmed silence, which, once disturbed, gave place to bursts of continued and oft-renewed plaudits. Nor was there lacking more substantial guerdon.

The princely Leopold, as well became the hero of the lyric, led the way by tendering a costly gold chain to his brother, with a request that his fair niece (who, as have we seen, was personified by Gertruda), should suspend it round the Minstrel’s neck.

The youth obeyed the gracious summons, and as he knelt with glowing cheeks to receive his guerdon at the hands of the supposed Princess, it would be difficult to say which of the youthful performers felt most embarrassed by the unrestrained admiration of the spectators. Following the example of their leader, gifts of value were proffered by many of his guests, but firmly though courteously declined ; only excepting a purse of ducats from the royal bounty, the contents of which were distributed amongst the subordinate musicians, who, pleading the danger of their mountain-paths, forthwith left the hall, well satisfied with their evening’s amusement.

A parley next ensued, in too low a tone to be heard by the guests, between the Lord Chamberlain and three of the party who remained behind, which was succeeded by their being conducted to seats at the royal table, near those occupied by Frederick and his immediate attendants. That assigned to their apparent leader was between the seeming Novice and her wary confessor ; and he failed not to take advantage of it by entering at once into a conversation with both, and frankly disclaiming all right to the Abbot’s thanks and compliments, by declaring that he had played no part but that of listener, and he must add, especially touching the last performance, admirer.”

“ Together, it should be added, with the whole audience,”

said the Abbot with genuine warmth. "That Minstrel's voice in verity equals any I remember to have heard even in Italy. Such, surely, cannot be the native product of Savoy?"

"Nature, my Lord Abbot," replied the stranger, "creates giants once in an age to assert her supremacy; but be the poet's skill from her, or schooling, it is enough that it has received the commendation of this good company. And yet more do I rejoice that our poor Savoyards have gained—perhaps I should say have reaped—so rich a harvest."

The speaker turned to the Princess, whose smile proved her sympathy. But the Abbot, apparently engrossed by the delight his cultivated taste had felt from the superior talent of the Minstrel, returned to the subject.

"The youth is a poet as well as a consummate musician."

"Small marvel that, when we are advised from whence he drew his inspiration;" and again the speaker glanced at his fair neighbour ere he addressed the Abbot.

"I would now in my turn ask your courtesy to answer *my* query. Yonder, I presume, sits the Princess Bertha, at the left of her sire?"

The Abbot bowed.

"I have heard much commendation of her beauty, and, by my troth, hardly too much; although, in one sense, she is not *quite* such as I had prejudged her."

"You must pardon me, sir stranger," replied the Abbot coldly, "if I say your expectations were a whit unreasonable."

"Report also extols the wit and high intelligence of this Princess," pursued the critic, as if uttering his thoughts aloud rather than heeding the Abbot's observation: "but touching this latter, or I shall doubt my skill in reading the human face, Fame is a flattering reporter. I pray you, observe how low those bright locks spring on a brow, fair I grant, but neither majestic nor intellectual in its retiring beauty." The last sentence was accompanied by an unmistakable reference to his fair neighbour, to whom the stranger gently added, "We must not hope, fair nun, that you will enter into such mundane subjects."

"In sooth, sir Hunter," she replied, "I set small store on outward proportions, unless, as here, it be the reflex of inward loveliness; but it doth seem to me I never looked upon a fairer face than that which hath just drawn forth your disparagement."

"Nay, not so! call you it a disparagement to the lily to say it is not the rose? I own the Princess to be fair, but not the fairest."

Speaking thus, the stranger laid his extended hand with *audible* emphasis on the table, and the action displayed one of remarkably fine proportions, though somewhat marred by a scar which encircled the thumb.

The Princess started and coloured; was it from the abruptness of the movement? was it the scar that marred, or the brilliant ring that adorned that hand, which riveted her attention, and that of the scrutinizing prelate? Whichever it might have been, it was not unperceived by its owner. Drawing the ring from his finger, and carelessly balancing it on the tip of it, he said,—

"You are doubtlessly marvelling, my lord, at the wide unlikeness of this costly bauble to the hand that wears it?"

"On the contrary, the hand well becomes the gem; perchance, I was regretting that hand should be somewhat marred, though by what, doubtless, was an honourable scar."

"I would not efface it, if it were yet deeper and more unsightly; it recalls the happiest passage in my life. But anent this ring: it cannot have escaped your sagacity, reverend father, that without some such credential the humble hunter of the Alps might not have been allowed a place at a royal table."

A general movement, occasioned by the rising of the Archduchess and the ladies of her suite, prevented the Abbot's reply; and he had the great satisfaction of breaking off a conversation which had already extended beyond his wishes, and of conducting his spiritual daughter to a side door, through which she vanished, together with the other performers in the motley pageant.

On returning to his seat, the Abbot found the, to him, inexplicable stranger still standing, his whole attention engrossed by the retreating group, and apparently quite unaware of that of which he was himself the object. This distinction in an assembly boasting so many claimants to public notice, the stranger probably owed, in a great measure, to a real or imaginary association with the Stauffachers and Tells, and other of the hero mountaineers of the period and country whose costume he wore. Not that he lacked intrinsic attraction, since, if his features were not critically regular, his countenance was noble and glowed with health and intelligence. Truth sat on his open brow, and an expression of benevolent good-humour softened the fire of his eye. His form, though somewhat robust for his little more than medium height, was strongly indicative of agility and muscular powers; and his movements were so unconstrained, his manner so unaffected, his voice so joyous, that the eye must have been both penetrating and practised to discern whether the semblance he wore were assumed or natural. Thus interest and curiosity were kept alive by the balance of opinion respecting his identity.

But it is time our bold hunter should speak as well as look in character. Filling a goblet with wine, even to its chased brim, he offered it to the Abbot, desiring he would pledge him to the health of the beautiful nun, and adding—

“On my troth, reverend father, I would have you bethink yourself of the mortal sin of hiding such a jewel where it can neither shine, nor be shined upon.”

“You forget, sir Hunter,” and the Abbot put the cup gravely by as he spoke, “that this bright gem is destined for the altar, and that your pledge is misapplied, both as regards its object and its participant.”

The stranger looked earnestly at the speaker.

“Gramercy! and was not her dress assumed for the nonce? I crave pardon of both;” and he shed the contents of the cup he held on the rush-covered floor, as he added, in a tone in which emotion blended with reprobation,—

"It were well, my Lord Abbot, that you placed your saint in a niche in which she might receive befitting homage. There is both danger and cruelty in allowing her to mingle in scenes in which she may not participate."

It were difficult to fathom the Abbot's reason for persisting in his equivocation, but his answer was calculated to sustain the deception.

"She does so only to bid them farewell ere she pronounces the irrevocable vow."

"The irrevocable vow! At least vouchsafe to let me know the shrine of this fair saint, that I may make a yearly pilgrimage to lay an offering on it."

"Many a sober truth falls from scoffing lips, my son. At any rate, you will not be the first bold hunter who has laid his bow and quiver on the altar of Koenigsfelden."

"Of Koenigsfelden? Then may all good angels protect that gentle dove from the talons of the Hawk!"

"They will, my son." And then, unable, perhaps, to resist the classic beauty of the similitude, the Abbot quoted the first two lines of St. Augustine's apostrophe to his sister:—

"Oh, pure and fairest! be thou like the dove
That seeks the silent grove to bathe her wing
In the clear stream—"

He stopped, and his attentive listener probably knew *why*, for he smiled as he remarked, "that there were other stanzas which—for he had often heard the minstrel sing these beautiful counsels of the saint to his young sister—might have suggested his misgivings for the lovely votaress of Koenigsfelden. Did they not run thus:—

"But should the hovering hawk be nigh'?"

"I was not aware that my quotation would have found so ready a critic," interrupted the Abbot, aware that any further reference to St. Augustine would be inopportune; "and I crave pardon for a theme so little befitting this festive occasion. Let us, then, leave holy maidens within their consecrated shades, and turn to such as Heaven hath placed in the full

beams of its meridian sun. Didst thou ever see our august Princess before?"

"Not since her childhood. I know not whether it be from contact with her icy step-dame, but she looked to me far better suited than our lovely Novice for your convent rule. Gramercy! my Lord Abbot," and the sunny eye again flashed from the passing cloud, "were it not for the rubicund rotundity of your Swiss shepherdess, and the roguish mirthfulness of those dainty little Calabrian contadini, I might have fancied myself in the midst of a gathering for the Holy Land, swelled from the overflowings of the cloister and the camp."

"In sooth, bold Hunter, you take advantage of your incognito to let fly your shots, careless whom they may hit."

"Nay, there you do me wrong. The only target I aim at is the plaything of the hour. Look around, and you will see more earnest play and deeper masquerading beneath the casque, the coronet, ay, and the cowl."

There was a pause of a minute or two, after which the same speaker continued:—

"The last few years have imprinted the wrinkles of a double number on Leopold's visage—the workings of his fiery soul consuming its feeble covering. And the wise Albert, too—methinks I can detect a note of sadness mingling with his politic hilarity. Even our noble Frederick—"

"Again," interrupted the Abbot, "I must curb your too daring humour."

"Fear me not. I would not, even with a sportive breath, blow aside one hair from that anointed head. My heart bleeds to behold those early furrows and untimely snows. Nay, fear me not. I have loved my sovereign Lord from boyhood up. He was my pattern of high chivalry; my model—I had almost said, my idol. I basked, I rioted in his early promise; why, *why* is its noonday sun obscured?"

"Only to break forth with renewed splendour. But see, his Highness beckons me to his side. Ere I depart, bold Hunter, let me exhort you to more circumspection; your next

neighbour may not regard your wild sallies with the same indulgence as he who now bids you farewell."

The caution was needless, as the cautioned felt little inclination to make any imprudent confessions to his neighbour, even if he had been conscious of having one. Heedless also of the din which surrounded him (become an uproar since the departure of the ladies), he sat, his cheek resting on his hand, quite unconscious of the notice which its sparkling jewel drew towards it, and thus ran the inward current of his thoughts and feelings,—

"Thou prince of priestly mummers! thinkest thou I did not detect thy endeavours to detach me from thy lovely victim? Yet *that* she shall never be, unless such be her will—But softly! What right have I to thwart her destiny? None but that of all the true-hearted and powerful to help the weak and oppressed; and, if I know the meaning of woman's smile and woman's voice, the convent is not the vocation for one formed to grace, ay, and to act in, the highest sphere of life. I marked that, although sweet modesty sealed her lips, her ear drank in all that passed, and her smile, so intelligent and so bright, showed she understood and felt. That smile, too, beamed on me—But I will think no more on that or thee. Go thy way gentle maiden; I must not bid thee stay; but *I* will depart to-morrow. My vows are given to one as good, as fair—nay, some might deem fairer: but never, except in a youthful dream, did I —"

A hand gently laid on the dreamer's shoulder awoke him. It was that of the Minstrel come to bid him, at the Duke's command, join his Highness in his private apartments, to which he had repaired, attended by the other stranger guests and some of the neighbouring barons. In this divan it was arranged for the whole party, on the morrow, to become the guests of one of these magnates, for the purpose of joining in the autumnal hunt of the wild boar, which at that season abounded in the forests around.

CHAPTER XXI.

MOONLIT MUSINGS.

And while I gaze, thy mild and placid light
Sheds a soft calm upon my troubled breast ;
And oft I think, fair planet of the night,
That in thy orb the wretched may have rest.

WHEN, on quitting the banquet, the Archduchess found herself in her private apartments, and surrounded only by her little court, strict etiquette gave way to those, so judged, feminine temptations—curiosity and a love of talking. The superstitious austerity of the devotee had somewhat thawed under the influence of the happiness of the wife ; and, in this elation of spirit at the return of her idolized husband, the Duchess tolerated, almost enjoyed, the playful efforts of her lovely little train-bearers to elicit from the Baroness von Hompe a secret of which

“ Nods and winks and wreathèd smiles ”

betrayed the possession. The desired disclosure, when at length dragged, or *bantered*, into light, amounted only to an observation of the Lord Chamberlain, “ that the comely Hunter of the revels resembled in face and form—that he wore a doublet of the same shade, and carried a crossbow of the exact length to those worn and borne by the famous Swiss Archer, Guillaume Tell, when cleaving the apple on the head of his son.”

This renowned feat the Chamberlain had seen with his own eyes twenty years ago ; and, as he added from the same testimony, “ that the younger Tell, then about ten years old, was somewhat of the make and complexion of the Minstrel, the sagacious lady in waiting remarked “ that there could be no reason on earth for doubting the identity of either father or son.”

"Not a whit," remarked the mischievous Alice, "unless we suppose the lapse of twenty years had wrought a somewhat greater change on the appearance of both."

The Baroness, although a little disconcerted at seeing her mountain threatened by this inch of lever, returned valiantly to the charge, suggesting, to the entire satisfaction of herself and the more credulous portion of her audience, "that perhaps the terror the lad had undergone in enacting the part of target had for a time retarded his growth and occasioned a later maturity."

"And the delight of his father at the happy issue had given *him* no doubt, a glow of perpetual youth," observed the sister wag with becoming gravity.

The lady in waiting looked a little doubtful whether this last sally were meant in jest or earnest, and said with some pique—and a great deal of emphasis,—

"Well, my Lady Aletta, be they whom they may, these strangers, I warrant, will not depart yet awhile; and you will see that all will turn out as my Lord Chamberlain has said."

Human nature has, and has always had, a far stronger bias towards the marvellous than the truthful; and, amongst its benefactors, seems least inclined to value the unraveller of mysteries and the dispeller of illusions.

The independence of our forefathers of dates, proofs, or possibilities made them the ready recipients of the incongruous legends of their Church, in which the whole course of nature is upset, and Truth—but for the musings of the contemplative, and the researches of the doubtful—would have remained beneath the rubbish with which superstition, ignorance, and tyranny had combined to smother her.

The Baroness was, on one point at least, a false prophetess. Before sunrise on the following morning, according to the already-mentioned arrangement of their noble hosts, the strangers left the Castle; her other prediction was of necessity held in abeyance.

The morning meal was more than usually dull, for the poor Archduchess had imposed on herself the penance of silence, in

atonement for the unusual hilarity of the preceding evening; and in her melancholy presence neither the banquet nor its mysterious guests were once named.

In those brief moments when the young party were free from the presence of their indefatigable governante, these forbidden subjects were fully discussed, and many surmises made and opinions given relative to the position and objects of the disguised knights—for such at least they must be to entitle them to a seat at the royal table—and the probability of their return to the Castle, of which Alice and Aletta expressed a somewhat saucy confidence. Indeed, these little ladies were the chief authority on all things connected with this interesting subject; and finding such attentive listeners in Bertha and Gertruda, sought for little confidence in return.

The banquet, that red-letter day of their brief lives (destined to throw its chequered lights and shadows over the future of these artless young creatures), was their constant theme, and they wearied not of recalling the courteous words and demeanour of our pseudo-Pedlar, who, having lost his pack, had assumed the more becoming habit of a hunter of the Alps. It seemed that, under favour of the Princess's also assumed guise, this said Hunter had been permitted a seat near them, and that there intercourse was unfettered by the restraints of court etiquette. Ah, our great ones of the earth pay, and dearly too, for their glories and renown!

Not to claim for our other favourites a reticence unsuited to their years, we will follow them as they thread their forest paths, and hear what influence those brief hours had exerted over their more tranquil spirits.

“I am so glad, Gertruda, to find myself alone with you,” said Bertha with a slight blush. “I do so want to talk over our adventures the other night, and, moreover, I have not yet thanked you for your flattering personification of my unworthy self. Methought you *princessed* it very royally.”

“If so, it must have been under the influence of a trance—indeed, the whole seems yet to be but a dream.”

“Then prithee tell it me!”

“I will try ; but I forewarn you there will be some breaks in it. When we entered the hall—nay, stay ! the dream began some time before. I think I first lost all consciousness of *self* when the Lady Alice brought me a mirror, and bade me look within it for her cousin Bertha. Too surely, I saw not the poor novice Gertruda there, neither did I find my Princess.”

Bertha smiled, but said not, what she really felt, that the copy was fairer than the original.

“When we entered the hall,” resumed Gertruda, “the blazing lights, the crowd, the clamour, took away my breath ; I know not how I reached the seat appointed for me, but have a confused recollection of the Chamberlain supporting me towards, and the Baroness pulling me down on it ; but it was a long time before I could lift my eyes, knowing that, as your representative, all others were fixed on me. The kind Princesses at length roused me by a pull at my sleeve, with a ‘How now, my cousin Bertha ! thou hast forgotten thyself, and shamest thy breeding.’ Then, ever and anon, they kept me up to my assumed character, and bade me not shelter my awkwardness under a semblance of humility, but comport myself as one on whom all eyes were fixed. Their well-timed reproofs had the desired effect ; for I took heart, and remembered whose place I filled. But when that Minstrel sang, I believe I dreamt again, for the whole scene breathed of dreamland. I seemed to have heard that strain before, to have seen that Minstrel youth ; and when I was called upon to fasten Duke Leopold’s guerdon around his neck, and he raised his eyes to mine, I thought there was something of a former meeting in the glance. But it was all a dream—a foolish one, I own ; yet, though my Princess never dreams herself, she will pardon it.”

“On the contrary, I do little else.”

“Did you, too, fancy you had seen your neighbour before ?”

“Whatever visions I might have indulged respecting that *mythical* personage, you must recollect that I had another neighbour, too wide awake to allow me to enjoy them ; but,

nevertheless, I may one day have a dream to relate to you."

"A pleasant one I am sure; for ever as I turned towards you, I thought I never saw you look more happy."

"I was happy. Amused too by a scene so novel. Nor was I an uninterested listener to the discourse of my neighbours; and then the Minstrel's song! The time only fled too quickly by, and I deemed the Duchess in too great haste to depart. Why do you look so sad, Gertruda? Did not you, too, find your share of happiness? Surely, if naught beside gave you pleasure, the Minstrel's art must have been prized by one herself so versed in harmony."

Gertruda tried to answer—tried to smile; but the tears would force themselves between her half-closed lids, and tremble on their dark lashes. After a little longer struggle, she said,—

"Perhaps, had I felt less pleasure in the scene, I should now feel less pain in believing such can never again return for me."

Bertha guessed her meaning, and felt the full force of its truthful sadness. The subject was never again named between them. Trained to complete self-negation and implicit obedience, Gertruda soon cast aside all, as she deemed, presumptuous desires, and resumed her cheerful enjoyment of sanctioned indulgences; whilst Bertha, taught in a more enlightened school, resigned her future to a higher direction; and the friends returned to their usual employments and recreations.

Not so the twin Princesses. Although with them also the exhausted theme was laid aside, yet it was plain to see that simple pleasures had lost much of their zest, and that the interests of the present were swallowed up in those of the past, and the future.

So day after day glided by, and no change came over the monotony of their lives; days which, before the recent excitement, flew on such light and variegated wings away now seemed dull and entirely devoid of interest or variety.

Excitement, however, came at last; but in a form little desirable to most of the party.

The festival of St. Klare was at hand, at which the presence of all the ladies of the Castle was indispensable. It was announced to take place with more than usual splendour, in commemoration of a notable miracle, vouchsafed for the edification, and as well glorification of her beloved Abbess and community, by the foundress and patroness, St. Klare, of odorous memory.

To Alice and Aletta this visit to Koenigsfelden was peculiarly distasteful, nay, even terrific. Their aunt, the Abbess, was the *buck-a-boo* of their nursery, the skeleton in the dark closet, ready to jump out on them and clasp them in her long arms; and if naught else could confine the almost ethereal volatility of their fairy gambols, her name would chain them to the spot with the most enduring docility.

They were quite aware of the efforts she had made to induce their father to allow of their being educated in her convent; and this looming of the gigantic spectre was, to them, like an eclipse of the sun to the little flowers, who close their petals, and the little birds who hide their heads under their wings at its approach. Furthermore, was she likened by them to a very dreadful rattle-snake, into whose open jaws these same innocent little birds jump against their will. They had no objection to an occasional visit to a convent—to coaxing nuns and condescending lady abbesses—none at all to bonbons and almond-cakes, or presents of pincushions, and little saints in bead-houses and lambs in cockle-shells, illuminated hearts, crosses and wax tapers. Neither did they rebel against church performances and processions; but this formidable Aunt would, they were sure, keep them to make nuns of them. Yes, she would open her mouth, and they *must* jump into it.

Bertha's aversion, if not so vividly expressed, had a more reasonable foundation. She, too, looked with dismay to this visit to Koenigsfelden, since, in addition to other unpleasant associations, she had a cause connected with it known only to Blandina and herself. Having despatched her nurse on a

confidential embassy, she retired early to her private apartments. She seated herself at an open casement, which looked into a court flanked on one side by the tower of the mysterious oratory, and fenced on the other two by a low paling, over which could be discerned a fine prospect of glade, forest, and towering mountain.

The evening was remarkably still, the birds had retired to their nests, and the cattle had been driven to their safe enclosures ere the wild beasts of the forest issued from their lairs. No sound was heard save the tread of the sentinel, and occasionally the interchange of the counter-sign. The court lay in deep shadow, as the moon had only begun to silver the distant hills ; but as the light of day faded the stars came out one by one, and as our heroine, like all others, *gazed* on the deep blue sky till it became studded all over with lights of spiritual brightness, earth and its allurements, its pains and perplexities, vanished from her thoughts, and her soul strained for companionship with the Unseen and the Infinite. It is true, she knew not, as we now know, that the countless stars above her were suns of other systems. It is true, science had not taught her, as it has instructed us, that the nearer luminaries were as a bright brotherhood revolving around one burning centre ; still less could our fair star-gazer of the fourteenth century have imagined that the moon, walking the sky in queenly dignity, was but the satellite of her own dark world. But she *did* know, and could emphatically declare with the poet of a more enlightened age,

“ My Father made them all.”

Nor was the hope denied her that in some such world of light she should, in a higher state of being, behold the Almighty Framer of the vast universe.

In such hours as this—hours of solitude and reflection—the mind of the young Christian was enabled to throw off doubts which, amid the superstitious rituals of her church, bore down the aspirations of her soul.

In these deep musings, that unfettered soul could separate

from the errors with which they were clogged, truths that the Romish Church still verbally recognizes, though practically denies. The Father's almighty power—the Son's redeeming love—the Spirit's sanctifying grace.

"My Principessa," said the careful nurse on her return from her mission, "let me close the casement: these autumnal nights are chilly."

"Not yet, not quite yet. I only want to see the moon rise above the tower. Sit thee down, dear nurse, till it bursts from its hiding-place, and tell me how thou hast sped in thy business. Didst thou see poor Inna?"

"At last. But I will relate my tale from the beginning. When I got to the house-dame's room, I found her in great distress. The nurse sent from the convent to attend on Inna was obliged to leave on account of sudden sickness, and the dame was so occupied by all that is going forward that I coaxed her to allow me to take her place for a little while by the bedside of poor Inna. Her conditions were, that I should wear her hood and fardingale, and speak as little as needs be, lest the patient should find me out. According to my promise, I put on the old body's close hood and neatly-plaited fardingale, and entered the sick chamber with a light step and heavy heart, to find the poor wench more changed than even I had feared. I shaded the lamp as I held a drink of cold water to her parched lips; a useless precaution—"

"Wherefore?" eagerly inquired Bertha. "Did she not notice you?"

"Alas, no! her mind wandered. Looking wildly at me, she called me Sister Eva, and bade her return the robe she had taken away."

"It is, then, as we suspected?"

"Even so. I knew from the first there was foul play, and had a strong suspicion of the tempter. I soothed the poor sufferer as best I could; gave her some refreshment, of which she stood sorely in need; for it was evident the nurse had known little of her business. I opened the casement too, for the air of the

room was spent and heavy ; and this, and it may be the gentle rocking in my arms, cooled and soothed her, till she fell into a sleep that became more and more tranquil. I watched her fair countenance till it gradually assumed its former innocent expression, and enjoyed every gentle breath she drew. Whilst thus engaged, the Leech arrived, and was pleased at finding his patient in such a sweet slumber. He beckoned me into the next room, and told me he had no doubt of her recovery if the poor creature had fair play. Doubtless he saw my surprise, for he said quickly, ‘ Do not think I have any misgivings of the good house-dame ; but I have very serious ones of the nurse, who is a creature of the monk Anselmo’s and his patron the new Prior. Some evil machination must be at work which counteracts all my remedies. However,’ he added, with a cheerful tone, ‘ I have an antidote in preparation which, in case my suspicions are correct, will baffle them in their turn ; provided the Abbot, as he has promised me, insists on Inna’s remaining under my care.’ ”

“ How glad I am of this ! You see now, Blandina—what I have often wished you to believe—that the Abbot is a kind protector of the oppressed.”

“ I grant he is to such as poor Inna, who do not cross his path ; but trust him not, my Princess. He is steeped in the falsehood and domineering ambition of his order ; and though he would not, like that black Inquisitor and his minions, have recourse to the dagger and the poisoned bowl, he would separate loving hearts, and shut up the young and the beautiful in a living tomb.”

Blandina stopped, but Bertha made no reply. Her eye was watching the gradual lighting up of the grey tower, as the moon rose above it, and flooded the court below with its unclouded beams. Blandina grasped her lady’s arm, and ~~sneak~~ pointed to a cowled figure which she had observed leaning over the bastion, and now was distinctly perceived by both as it moved stealthily out of the tell-tale light. Blandina hastily closed the casement, and followed her mistress into the adjoining apartment.

"We are watched," said Bertha, whose pale countenance betrayed her terror of the intruder.

"By the monk Anselmo;" and even the courageous Blandina trembled as she spoke.

"Do you think he could have overheard our conversation?"

"Hardly; and yet ears accustomed to eavesdropping become wondrously acute; and they say in the convent that Anselmo, like the lynx, can see in the dark. Oh, my beloved child," and Blandina's voice changed from the tone of raillery to that of solemn feeling, "would that you were far away from that dark abbey, safe under the loving charge of one who would not allow any of its wily crew to touch one bright hair of your head!"

The bright blush and radiant smile showed that Blandina's allusion was understood; but both faded as poor Bertha confided to her earliest friend the unknown impediments which appeared to threaten the accomplishment of their hopes, from her father's dark hints, and almost avowed preference of another suitor.

"Nay, nay" exclaimed the astonished listener, "you would not do your noble sire such injustice as to believe he would crush the hopes fostered by his own hand? The beautiful blossoms which opened beneath his approving smile—"

"And," said Bertha, unconsciously pursuing the wise Blandina's inference, "did he not solemnly betroth me to the preserver of my life? Did he not bid my now sainted preceptress keep up the memory of that scene, otherwise, in its terror and its joy, so imprinted on my young heart as never to be forgotten by it? Didst not thou, too, my tender nurse, relate his deeds of kindness to thy persecuted people? Ah, ye were all traitors, and your treachery was but too successful."

"Nay, I call it not by that name to induce her whom we best loved to share the throne and the heart of the noblest Prince in Christendom."

"Yet liberty is precious—oh, how precious!" said Bertha, her eyes filling with tears. "My father's chain is lengthened,

but I fear not unpadlocked. Pray for me, pray for *us*, Blan-dina, that our trials may not be greater than our integrity."

" You do not doubt that of your betrothed ? "

" Oh no, no ; sooner would I doubt the sun's reappearance in the heavens. Doubt ?—but thou shalt hear."

And the Princess proved, to the entire satisfaction of herself and her confidante, that the two facts of the lover's and the sun's return were of equal certainty. Beautiful vision of pure confiding love ! The dark phantom of the prowling friar, the dreaded festival of St. Klare, even poor Inna's poisoned chalice, were chased by thee from the slumbers of one of the loveliest of thy votaries.

Will thy bright dreams be realized ?

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FÊTE OF ST. KLARE.

Exiles from Eden's thornless bowers,
Your blissful place of birth,
Ye were sent forth to shed, sweet flowers,
A lingering smile o'er earth—
A gracious boon to fallen man were given,
A breath of Paradise—a gleam of Heaven!"

ON the evening of the following day the Archduke Frederick returned to the Castle, but unaccompanied by their recent guests, whom they represented as still detained by the pleasures of the chase, and the almost compulsory hospitality of the neighbouring landowners.

At the early breakfast of the next morning, the Archduchess was absent; and to account for this deviation in one so punctual, Gertruda was commissioned to inform the party that her Highness had gone the evening before to the nunnery to keep the vigil of their patron saint.

"Beshrew my addle-pate!" exclaimed Leopold, springing from his seat, and fumbling in the pockets of his doublet, "but for this reminder I had forgotten to deliver this billet with which our sister charged me—how long ago, I hardly dare think. Here it is at last, Frederick, but I fear sadly mauled."

The Duke undid the silken cord which bound the note, and having conned its contents, said,—

"The Abbess bids us all to high mass this morning; and here is a special mandate for ye, my maidens. 'Please you present my greetings to my young cousins, and announce to them that, as it hath pleased our Lady Patroness, the holy St. Klare, to work a most notable miracle in glorification of our house and Order, I purpose, in especial celebration thereof,

to increase the splendour of the procession ; and furthermore, to provide for the contentment and refreshment of the sisters a little banquet, which I beseech them to honour by their welcome presence.' Leopold, thou wilt accompany us ?'

"Thou must hold *me* excused to our sister ; but my demoiselles owe this dutiful courtesy to their aunt." Then turning to them, the father added, "And it is better be paid before *our* festivals begin."

"An't please ye, my respected sire," said Alice, getting up and courtesying with quaint humility, "penance usually comes after indulgence."

"As Lent after Carnival," said the sister Echo, placing herself at her side.

"And, moreover, our sanctimonious aunt is so desirous of shutting us up in her abbey that we had better secure our holiday before we trust ourselves in her—"

"Most royal clutches," added the younger sister.

"Ye are saucy-minded," said the father, attempting to look grave ; "and, by the bones of St. Ursula, I have a month's mind to make nuns of ye both. But away ! don your riding gear—provided our sage cousin consent to travel in such companionship."

"What winsome fairies those daughters of thine are, Leopold!" said Frederick, who had watched the little scene with infinite amusement. "Just such as in our boyhood we believed danced round mushroom-rings, or peeped out of clochen-bells on Allhallows Eve—a little magnified perhaps, and but little. My tiny offsets are but as the slender willow beside thy graceful cedar," observed Leopold, and there was scorn on his lip and a cloud on his brow as he spoke.

"That is as taste may decide," interposed the wise Albert, who, apparently absorbed in his own cogitations, seemed to take no notice of what passed around. "Whatever turn events may take, brethren mine, ye will have naught to answer for in the degeneration of the race of Hapsburg."

"That observation of thine is true as it is kind," said the

elder brother, "for the fair outward form of thy nieces has its counterpart within. I may not magnify my own Bertha; but I have marked amid all their graceful quips and sports, there peeps forth in my young cousins the noble truth and dignity of their race."

"They are in verity buds of fair promise, and will grace any soil into which they may be transplanted," replied Albert; and turning to Leopold he added, "Hast thou never contemplated returning one of thy daughters to that in which their mother flourished? The King of Naples asks a Princess of Hapsburg for his son."

Leopold interrupted his mild brother with his usual rude impetuosity, exclaiming impatiently, "Hist! hist! The steeds are prancing in the court. Come along, Fritz! I will help in the mounting."

Whilst the royal party are on their way to the Abbey, our early acquaintance, Henga, has reached it on an urgent embassy to his friend and patron, Father Swithin; and both are observed in eager confabulation by Sister Eva, who stands as usual at her observatory, the little side-door already noticed.

"Whither away so hastily?" she exclaimed, darting forward. "The grass will never grow beneath thy footsteps, bless the Pope!"

"I don't think the Holy Father troubles himself much about the movements of such a poor lay brother of St. Francis as I," said the old man, with his usual inward chuckle.

"Go to! thou must always have thy jeer."

"Yet I can't stay to speak with thee now, good sister, seeing I must attend to the lad, who is come on a business too grave for thy comprehension, and therefore we will leave thee free to follow thine."

Henga clapped his hands, apparently with joy, at this discomfiture of his enemy; and but that astonishment at this unlooked-for demonstration, and intense curiosity had put a curb on her offended dignity, his ears might have suffered from his temerity. As it was, the nun meekly replied,

"that her ignorance needed instruction and scarcely merited rudeness."

"Well, well, thou mayest tarry for thine own contentment, but interrupt not our business, although it seems thou hast none of thine own," said the placable gardener; then, turning to the lad, he added eagerly, "Thou sayest, Henga, that the poor wench is *in articulo mortis?* Doth not the Leech understand that the *quinte essenze*, which compose the precious elixir, must first pass through the alembic?"

Henga bowed assent.

"And art thou not cognizant also, that I can depend on none but thee to convey these aforesaid essenze to Father Celestine, to be by him submitted to the purifying and concentrating power of his distillery?"

The answer to that part of the Father's instructions which was within poor Henga's comprehension, would have been a hasty stride across the court in the direction of St. Hilda's cave, had not the sender caught hold of his messenger.

"Softly, softly, my son! Do I not well compare thee to the nimble Saint Mercurius, who, as we are bound by the holy legends of our church to believe, was born with wings on his ankle-bones—ay, and on either side of his head to boot. He too, in furtherance of the similitude, like thee, was a skilful compounder of drugs. But thou *must* tarry whilst I specifically name to thee these essenze;" and, extending his right hand, Father Swithin proceeded more emphatically in the enumeration by laying the forefinger of the other on its thumb. "Now, these *quinte essenze*, as the name imports, are five in number: *Imprimis*, skin of snake."

Henga shook his matted locks and pointed to his second finger.

"True, boy, true; what a memory thou hast!" and the old man looked with evident exultation at Sister Eva; but perceiving she was about to presume on this recognition of her presence, he hastily resumed his catalogue. "Yes, thou art right, boy; eye of toad is for the thumb; then comes spawn of frog;" and the finger was carried on at each dainty enu-

meration—"skin of snake, liver of newt, and a handful of moss from a dead man's skull."

"Why, that trenches on the sexton's privilege," almost shrieked the astonished and more than ever inquisitive sister. "I adjure thee, by the kalends of St. Gregorius, tell me what wretched victim thou art about to poison?"

"Poison!" reiterated the indignant friar. "Did I not caution thee not to meddle with what thou canst not understand? I tell thee that what thou ignorantly callest *poison* is a concoction of equal merit, and, for aught I know to the contrary, may be composed of some of the same rare and precious ingredients as that marvellous elixir used by the sanguiniferous St. Janarius, which continueth to this time, and doubtless will to the end of the world, to astonish, by its wondrous liquefaction, the whole of Christendom."

"I crave pardon, good father, it was but a slip of the tongue. I meant, rather, to ask whom it was thou wert about to raise from the dead—nay, be not wrath! I only ask, if it pleaseth thee better, whose sore strait demands such a—wonderful remedy?"

"By the jawbone of St. Esculapius, good sister, I know naught but that it is demanded in behoof of one of our gracious Princess's tire-women."

"The Princess's tire-women!" repeated the nun, in a tone expressive of somewhat more than curiosity. "Tell me, I pray thee, which. Is she hight Blandina, or Inna?" and she caught hold of the gardener's sleeve.

"I can not tell thee, not having been at the baptizing of either."

"Nay, nay, it cannot be the young maiden—she with sunny rings and laughing eyes?"

"What know I of any eye but a day's-eye?" said the provoking wag. "It is enough for me that the wench is ill, and wants my elixir as a last hope."

"And well it may be such," said the nun, who loved a joke as well as her tormentor, "or no human throat would swallow such a heathenish potion. But surely you can tell me if the sick woman be young or old?"

"Not I. Address thyself to Henga; and, gentle ~~sister~~, an't please ye, let go my sleeve, for I am in sore ~~haste~~."

This she did; and turning angrily towards the lad, she repeated her unanswered question, "which of the Princess Bertha's tire-women was the object of this unusual drenching?"

Alas, poor Sister Eva's patience was doomed to further trial! If Henga heard, he certainly did not heed the questioner, and would have followed Father Swithin had she not placed herself directly in his way, repeating vehemently, and raising her voice louder and louder at each unanswered interrogatory,—

"Answer me, boy, which is it? The young or the old? The short or the tall? The plump or the lean? The dark or the fair?"

By the time the baffled catechiser had got to the end of her antitheses, her voice had mounted almost to a scream, which it finally attained, as she added,—

"I tell thee what, thou *jackanapes*! if thou dost not reply, thy ears shall pay the penalty of thy contumacy."

No doubt Henga had good reason to fear the execution of the threat; for retreating a few paces, and shaking his hair over his ears and face, he solemnly replied as the enraged questioner again demanded "which?"

"She that is sick and like to die," and then made off as rapidly as his long legs would carry him.

"That fool will drive me mad," muttered the exhausted gossip. "I tell thee, father," she continued, addressing Henga's champion, who had returned to the rescue, "if thy *pet* has not a grain of brains, he has an ounce of malice in his stupid noddle. But *pray* you tell me—for you must remember the Princess's head attendant—the tall outlandish woman coifed in black: it would be a great comfort to me to know it was she who is in mortal agony."

"A benevolent consolation I cannot indulge thee with, kind sister; but dost not thou hear loud knocking at the great gate?"

"The little side-door in the corner is unbarred; let them come in at that."

"Bless the Pope!" added Henga, who had resumed his position at his guardian's elbow.

The Sister looked round in angry surprise.

"What, thou hast found thy tongue! suppose thou exercisest thy legs also, and let these noisy applicants in."

Henga seized the keys in the hope of letting himself out, when a retainer in the royal livery approached to request that the portals might be thrown open to admit the Archduke and his suite. The arrival of the party, so long before the hour of mass, was a subject of such embarrassing excitement to Sister Eva as even to lay her unsatisfied curiosity to rest for the moment, and she hastened to unlock the gate.

Here the party alighted, and whilst the Porteress led the way into the parlour, sidling along with many a courteous welcome and graceful bow, Bertha recognized her old favourites Swithin and his inseparable helpmate, and introduced them to the notice of her father.

The Archduke held out his hand, which the old man kissed on bended knee; but when the same condescension was extended to Henga, the lad recoiled a few steps, shook back the elf-locks from his fair forehead, and deeply plaintive eyes now glowing with unnatural brilliancy. His form dilated, and as he haughtily crossed his arms on his breast, he seemed for one short minute to be raised to a parity with his kind—the next the sudden irradiation had vanished; his limbs fell nerveless and flaccid, his head drooped, and his tangled hair falling again over his face concealed all but the quick glancing of his eye.

Gertruda and Swithin, equally mortified at this strange reaction, tried to make the boy aware of the honour he so rudely rejected, but their efforts were fruitless.

"Cross not his humour," said the Prince, with melancholy gentleness. "We are too much indebted to his mother to resent his waywardness; and how know we but this very obligation may not have entailed this strange malady on her

offspring? But," and he spoke with renewed cheerfulness as he addressed himself to more courteous listeners, "as the Abbess is engaged in the choir, and we have a spare hour before mass, we will crave of Father Swithin to show us his vegetable curiosities, of which Fame has so loudly trumpeted."

"Fame is an arrant deceiver," said the delighted horticulturist; "but if your Highnesses will condescend to walk round the ladies' garden, ye will see what their poor servitor has done for them."

Now, in spite of Swithin's assertion, Fame had only done him justice. The garden, considering that horticulture was (as we conceited gardeners of the nineteenth century assume) then in its infancy, was a blooming and fruitful marvel. Nay, even now, when it has risen into a science, we doubt not our dear old gardener would bear off the chief prizes at a Crystal Palace flower show; more especially if he exhibited his vegetable geese and shrieking mandrakes. But, not to insist on these last-named wonders, there were some arts in grafting and budding, in the colouring of flowers, as well as in the concoction of the *quinte essense*, that have perished together with the wonder-working MSS. from which they were culled. Happily, some of the valuable receipts are yet preserved in the herbal, now very scarce, of old Gerard, who gives his testimony to the possibility of raising vegetable geese, though unfortunately he has failed to convey his instruction for their production in language sufficiently clear for modern practice.

The visitors were charmed; the fairy Princesses threaded the labyrinthine walks in delighted wonderment, which was raised to its climax by broods of hens and chickens cut out of box-trees, with chanticleers on the top who shook their wings, and crowed at their approach—all of which we are bound to believe, with them, was the effect of the gardener's skill in training and pruning.

The Prince, who enjoyed their surprise, assured them there were yet greater wonders in store for their inspection. The artist was delighted and delightful; but those who best understood his humour might have perceived that the Duke's

inquiry after the shrieking mandrakes threw a slight shade over his content. Nevertheless, he did not betray any symptoms of defeat, but made a graceful retreat without impugning the truthfulness engrained in his simple nature.

“Setting aside my fear of terrifying these noble demoisels by their discordant screams, I am free to confess that I have not as yet obtained full power over these unruly vegetables, who persist in choosing their own time of utterance. Thus, I observe, that unless the moon is at her full, or nearly so, or the storm is rattling in the pine-tops, I have never heard the sound of their voices. Our excellent Leech who, I own, besides his healing skill, knows overmuch of the wonders of nature, failed to detect aught but the shriek-owl or the wind when I called on him to listen. But your Highness, who no doubt is skilled in book-lore, knows that there are secrets in nature which the most learned clerk may not pry into.”

“Certes, and that she withholds from her warmest admirers.”

“Ah, your Highness reasoneth truly. Observe the flexile laurel! I have read in the precious manuscripts which my Patron, God rest his soul! bequeathed unto me, that it was once the abode of the pious Saintess Daphne, who, flying from Apolyon the great dragon, was embraced in its bark. Therefore do I opine that these hideous mandrakes must have sprung from the footsteps of that great dragon. It is an evil race, and I almost wish I had never meddled therewith.”

“And why not pull them up?” asked Bertha.

“That dare I not, my Princess, since so terrific would be their shrieks as to madden the poor sisters; and maybe, with Sister Eva at their head, they would, like the harpies of old, tear me and Henga in pieces.”

“You are quite right,” said the Duke. “The good sisters, as well as my demoisels, are better entertained with your cheerful chanticleer and his chuckling Partlets. But, now I think on it, how fare the vegetable geese?”

“Ah there,” said the horticultural Pygmalion, brightening, “I do not doubt of success—nay, I may say I have already

attained it, as your own gracious eyes will testify, if your Highnesses will follow me a few paces."

Leading the way through an avenue of the graceful acacia, they reached a low part of the garden, where the mountain stream had been widened into a little lake. In the midst of its pellucid waters rose a fairy island, on which grew the magic tree covering its whole extent, and dipping its pendent branches on every side into the water. Those ignorant of vegetable zoology might have supposed this graceful zoophyte to have been a luxuriant specimen of the willow genus—indeed, we doubt if Linnæus, had he been then existent, would have discovered any difference, unless it were in the small shell-like substances which seemed to grow on the extremity of the branches. These, the gardener pointed out to the admiring, and nothing doubting, spectators as vegetable eggs, which in the hatching time fell from the goose-tree into the water, and were immediately hatched.

"And this," he added, "I can myself testify, having seen many a fine brood of vegetable goslings; but, unfortunately, so quickly did they swim away that ere I could get out the boat they were out of sight."

"What a pity!" exclaimed more than one voice. "And did you never succeed in catching one?"

"I have never been nimble enough, but Henga has, and gave it to Herr Baumgarten" (the sceptical Leech already mentioned), "and he had it cooked, and declared it relished to his palate much the same as the flesh of the wild geese, of which large flocks visit our waters in hard weather. It was Lent, and therefore I dared not taste it, or of a surety I should have discovered some choicer flavour than that in such rare flesh."

"Henga is lithe of limb, though slow of wit," said the Prince thoughtfully rather than interrogatively.

"He *is* lithe of limb and slow of speech, but not of wit, your Highness; and I could recount many wise sayings, ay, and noble actions of his in proof of this assertion—"

But the sound of the abbey-bell cut short the enumeration and changed the subject.

"We have yet half an hour before the saint will commence her progress," continued Father Swithin, "and if I might make so bold, I would offer these lovely ladies a little cooling refection after their walk?"

Thus saying, the adroit guide led the party to the foot of "Our Lady's Mount," where, in the grotto already described, they discovered a fresh source of enchantment; the green retreat being hung with gossamer-like baskets suspended from the roof by chains of flowers, and filled with autumnal fruit of the most tempting hue and fragrance.

"I trust your Highness," said the old man respectfully, pointing to the rustic seats, "will hold my poor Henga excused for his late breach of duty, and with these gracious ladies, will condescend to partake of the fruits he has culled—indeed, I may say, together with my humble self, cultivated—for your refreshment."

The guests required no second bidding, and many were the jests and ringing laughs that echoed through the vaulted roof as they partook of this fairy banquet. Neither did it lack its accompaniment of magical music, though the skilful magician had wisely managed that the concert should not begin until ample justice had been done to the repast, and free scope given for the lighter spirits to evaporate; well divining that all would give way to the wonder of the unseen musician who, in strains already described, warbled the well-known Vesper Hymn, but remained as before wrapped in impenetrable mystery.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LOST FOUND.

Christians! do ye the cause inquire?
Search God's own book, and see,
Graven in characters of fire,
Accursed *Idolatry*.

As the twin sisters, one on either side of their cousin—to whom they clung closer the nearer they approached the dreaded Abbey—mounted the steps from the garden, the following dialogue passed between them; but so alike were they in voice and sentiment that it might have seemed rather a soliloquy to those who did not see the speaker's countenance; and even then the resemblance was so perfect, that in these days we might compare them to the two answering photographs on the slide of the stereoscope, for it needed long experience to separate them even in idea. And yet their characters differed greatly; but the weaker had absorbed so strong a light from the more powerful that a casual intercourse would not be sufficient to discern the borrowed, or reflected, from the original. On this occasion, as on most others, Alice began the running dialogue, in right of her seniority of half an hour, which she always playfully asserted. Passing her hand across her eyes, she said,

“Verily, dear coz, I seem to be hardly awake, but dreaming about—”

“Prince Florival and the singing water—”
“And the talking trees—”
“And the dear blue bird, and—”
“Oh, Alice, the wicked giantess!”
“Fie, fie! my naughty cousins,” interrupted Bertha, “there are no wicked giantesses in our fairy palace; but I will help you to a beauteous Princess.”

“Gertruda?”

“Ay, indeed; where is she?”

The novice had lingered behind her companions; perhaps to take another look at her Eden; perhaps to take another walk around its parterres, or dip her hand in its dancing waters. And what are the thoughts that pass through her mind as she stands apparently watching their play? Do they recur to the past, when her beloved, now her only friend, looked on them with her? Do they stretch on to the future, when she shall stand alone beside them? But a few minutes had gone by when she was the happiest of the merry band; was it that she was pleased to revisit the only scene of enjoyment that had chequered her life, and proud of the praises bestowed on it? Let those answer these questions who are deepest versed in that “gayest, saddest thing,” the human heart. One thing was certain, that Gertruda’s swelled with delight at the sympathy of the young Princesses—she was, from circumstances, yet more simple and childish than they—and had she remained in the shade of the cloister the beautiful germ would never have developed; but it was ordered otherwise.

This convent garden, to which we now return, was poor Gertruda’s Eden, and she had from the time of the Princess Bertha’s residence in the convent, been allowed to frequent it with her; for, as it was the Abbess’s paramount desire that her niece should succeed her in the rule of the superb endowment of Koenigsfelden, she omitted nothing within her power to make it attractive to her. Perceiving Bertha’s love of gardening, she gave her full scope for the exercise of her taste, and permitted her friend, and her revered preceptress to wander with her, as we have seen, amid her favourite haunts; to watch the labours of Father Swithin and his assistant, and to enter into all their horticultural speculations.

The approach of Henga with a basket of flowers startled Gertruda from her cogitations. Whatever they might have been, they did not interfere with the pleasure she felt at his approach, or the interest she took in the contents of his basket, and the arrangement of the beautiful little bouquets it contained.

“Oh! you want me to guess, do you?” said she, sweetly smiling, as the poor boy held them up before her. “This lovely lily and its circle of amaranths must be for the Princess Bertha?”

Henga shook his head; and a tear trembled in poor Gertruda’s eye as the boy placed the flowers in her hand.

“Thanks, many! but they are too beautiful for me. I cannot err now: these twin roses and their accompanying heartsease must be meant for the sister Princesses. And, tell me, what hast thou for my Princess?”

Henga placed the basket hastily in Gertruda’s hand as the only reply, and darted off on perceiving his especial antipathy, Sister Eva, advancing from her watch-tower.

“Heyday! what’s all this parley about?” she exclaimed, as she snatched the basket from its lawful possessor. “Why, here are the sweetest and the finest flowers, whilst that false fool pretended he had none but daisies and sunflowers for my chapel of St. Klare. I shall, nathless, make bold to claim these in behoof of the Church—bless the Pope!”

“Nay, blame not Henga, dear sister: he fetched these flowers—and beautiful, in truth, they are—at the express desire of the ladies Alice and Aletta.”

“Leave, then, the corbel with me, and I will consign it to the care of one of the Castle servitors. But why didst thou loiter behind in the garden, whilst our Lady Abbess has been expecting thee to pay thy devoir to her in the parlour, and has now sent me to summon thee?” Gertruda knew *why*, but chose not to tell. Making, therefore, her humble obeisance, she hurried away to obey the mandate, and to take her part in the drama.

The beautiful Abbey church was metamorphosed into a brilliant theatre, in conformity with the scenes to be enacted within it. The pillars of finely-wrought granite were enclosed in a closely-fitting covering of rich damask; the inlaid floor covered with tapestry; the high altars, as well as those of the side chapels, formed of marble or porphyry were shrouded in cloth of gold and bedizened with artificial flowers, shell-work,

beads, and other inconsistent ornaments: an anomaly we cannot reconcile in the taste of those who carved those pillars, or caused them to be carved, who paid immense sums for those slabs of costly stone, and employed the most skilful artists to hew them into the most classic forms.

But these disfigurements, so well exposed by a learned dignitary of our own Church,* have not ended with other barbarisms of the middle ages. As late as the year 1862, the most beautiful church in the world, St. Peter's at Rome, was tricked out like a second-rate theatre—the noble arches of the nave filled up with silk and velvet stretched on pasteboard frames, gilded festoons and such trumpery; and we too join in the wonder expressed by the same author, “How the Pope and Prelates of Rome, who may see daily in the Vatican the most beautiful works of ancient and modern art, both in sculpture and painting, could tolerate these wretched processes of ecclesiastic upholstery and millinery. . . Is it that they cannot appreciate what is noble in its native beauty?” and that the loaded magnificence and glare of the ritual so dazzles their eyes and vitiates their taste that they are incapable of discerning the truly beautiful—moral or material?

There was one at least in the church of Koenigsfelden whose eyes were neither dazzled by the pompous ceremonial, nor closed to the disfigurement of the classic structure, and who turned aside as the Patroness of the order and Saint of the day, represented by an ill-carved figure as large as life and sumptuously bedizened, was carried past her in its thrice-repeated tour round the church, with the usual accompaniments and followers. One figure alone amid the motley procession of priests and acolytes, friars and nuns, caught and fixed the attention of the contemplative Princess and filled her mind with melancholy forebodings: it was that of her friend the Novice, who walked in the procession with downcast eyes, her countenance concealed by a long veil which fell in folds over her figure, and differed only in colour from that worn by the

* See Dr. Wordsworth's “Visit to Italy.”

cloistered sisters. Her step was firm, her form upright, and, whatever might have been the repugnance of her friend to the ceremonies going on around, Gertruda evidently bore her part in them without the same painful doubts.

On quitting the church, the Archduke left the Abbey, and the young party were summoned into the awful presence of the Aunt-abbess. Still clinging to their cousin, who, whilst she did her best to allay their fears, felt her own heart beat and her limbs tremble, the sisters entered the room, pale as marble statuettes, their terror having absolutely damped their silken ringlets, which hung almost waveless over their cheeks. The queenly Abbess held out a cold rigid hand to each, and as they made their speechless obeisance, attempted some words of solemn encouragement, which served but to increase their agitation.

“Diffidence,” she observed, with her usual sepulchral accent, “was youth’s best adornment—a flower that flourished most in the shade, and she rejoiced to find that her youthful kinswomen still preserved their modest deportment.”

The voice ceased, but it raised no echo, and thus went on:—

“I would fain persuade your father to spare one of you for our holy mother Church, and her favoured daughter, St. Klare. If he consent, which shall it be?”

Another pause, and the poor little hearts beat almost audibly.

“Ye are so much alike I should hesitate to sever ye; will ye not both come?”

There was a slight raising of the voice as, looking at the three girls who stood before her, the Abbess went on,—

“What! silent still? Is there not one of my nieces, sprung as ye all are from a race famed for its devotion to their holy Mother, willing to give herself to God and to St. Klare?”

That good angel, Sister Ethel, now came to the rescue; for though the Abbess meant to be condescending, the sound of her voice and the cold glance of her eye, as it swept expressionless over the trembling girls, had almost petrified them with terror.

“These young Princesses, reverend mother, come recently

from the neighbourhood of the Abbess Hildegarde," observed the nun ; and her benevolent intention was successful, for the current of the Abbess's thoughts was immediately diverted into another channel.

"True, good sister." Then addressing the sisters, "You, my young kinswoman, live close by the Abbey of Klingenthal, which owns the sway of the saintly Hildegarde?"

The heads bowed assentingly.

"Was my highly-esteemed friend cognizant of your visit to Hapsburg?"

The heads were shaken negatively.

"Nay, I marvel, my nieces, ye did not inform the holy Abbess Hildegarde of your approaching proximity to Koenigsfelden, seeing that she would have been right satisfied to forward by your hands a finger-joint of the blessed saint and martyr, Engelhopner, whose odoriferous remains have just been dug up in her cloister."

A slight shudder passed over the poor little living martyrs at the mention of this fragrant commission, and their cheeks, if possible, became yet paler.

"But surely, my cousins, you profit by your vicinity to enjoy the Abbess's conversation?"

A pause.

"You attend the services of the Church, so devotionally celebrated at the Abbey,"

Another pause longer than before.

"Speak, I pray ; why should you fear ? Again I ask, do you visit the Abbey?"

Alice made a vigorous effort, and articulated the monosyllable "Some," to which Aletta, at the risk of strangulation, added that of "times."

But the exertion was too much. Bursting into tears, and throwing themselves into each other's arms, they sobbed as if their fluttering hearts would break. The Abbess was evidently disturbed ; she looked wildly round and then fixed her filmy eye on Bertha, who knowing the indication but too well, whilst endeavouring to comfort and assist her cousins, felt

herself as helpless and terrified as they. But the rustle of the angel's wing was heard.

"These dear young ladies have had no food since their early breakfast, reverend mother, and are faint and weak. With your permission, they will join our sisters in the refectory, where the banquet waits their coming. My beloved daughter, thou knowest the way;" and she added in a lowered voice, "The attack will pass off; fear not!"

The spacious refectory was adorned with a profusion and taste that betrayed the agency of our "house decorators" of the olden time. The most stately ornament was a bowery shrine, in which, clad in a vest of *green Genoa velvet*, with tunic of silver taffeta, and knots of ribbons and other garniture appertaining to the same, and in the glare of new paint and varnish, sat the miraculous idol. As the nuns were standing around the banquet table waiting the approach of their guests, the Princess had not just then time to examine the details; but a single glance convinced her at least of the justice of her suspicions. She shook off, as best as she could, the painful feelings it gave rise to, and her ever-ready sympathy was soon enlisted in the promotion of general enjoyment. Sister Eva advanced towards her distinguished guests, and conducted them to seats near her own at the head of the table. As the heroine of the day she wore, according to conventional usage, a garland of flowers over her nun's hood—or rather, instead of the customary wreath a triple crown composed of three kinds of large showy flowers, which, sticking out all round her plump face, now more than usually rubicund, was irresistibly comical. Very seasonable was it also in raising the spirits of the drooping sisters, whose eyes glistened with irrepressible merriment, and even the straightened tresses began to curl in spiral rings; whilst Bertha and Gertruda, who readily recognized in the mimic *papal* crown the gist of St. Eva's mortal enemy, Henga, were quite as much amused. The nun, however, had her revenge—though in the matter of the crown she was perfectly unaware of owing him anything but obligation—for she had appropriated all Henga's nosegays, and their apt posies, and

laid them on the trenchers of her guests, receiving with apparent humility the universal testimony paid to their beauty and appropriateness. The banquet was as fair to the eye as it was grateful to the taste and smell of its participants. Nuns have always been celebrated for their cakes and confectionery, and those of St. Klare were not behind the most advanced order of cooking sisterhoods. To say nothing of the preserved fruits, clear as crystal and spangled with frost-work—of creams light and white as mountain snow—of birds' nests with sugared eggs,—of golden cages and imprisoned linnets—the surpassing wonder was a bouquet of Father Swithin's flowers preserved with the most consummate art of sugar, or rather honey embalming, the congealed drops on their leaves looking, as the delighted gardener himself declared, “as if the dew that sparkled on the petals had been suddenly frozen, and the flowers gathered ere the frost could nip their freshness or impair their hue.” Hide your heads, ye Glasses of the past, ye Udes and Soyers of the present age, or bow them before the veiled confectioners of Koenigsfelden! And, ye Paxtons and other famed horticulturists, do homage to the wonder-working friar and his mysterious assistant!

There was a great deal of mirth at the convent board; we do not say wit or wisdom, unless it be that true wisdom—the wisdom of a thankful heart. Sister Eva was even more than usually brilliant, judging from the peals of laughter which her sallies elicited. The sister Princesses came next in the estimation and attention of the sisterhood. Their beauty, their affability, their playfulness, their simplicity and youthfulness, made them objects of universal attraction and admiration. But the vesper-bell breaks up the banquet—the brief, brief, holiday is over! The prattle is hushed, the laugh has died away; and with a graceful obeisance the now demure sisters glide off in regular file. Sister Eva was following them, but the gentle Ethel, thinking to do her honour, called her back, to give her, as she believed, the gratification of showing off her miraculous vest and accompaniments to the Princesses; and relating its supernatural advent to the convent. The

summons could not be disobeyed, but it was evident that the heroine of the drama did not play her part with her usual graceful ease, and that on meeting the eye of Bertha she lost her self-possession and turned somewhat pale. With a shrinking from the shame of an open exposure, which is oftentimes more felt by the innocent than the guilty, the Princess turned away to examine the other decorations of the refectory ; and, released from the awkwardness of telling the story of the stolen garment in the presence of its lawful owner, Sister Eva recovered her self-possession, and it might be added self-delusion, and related the history of the miraculous descent of the wondrous garment, its self-adjustment to the graceful form of St. Klare's representative, together with all the usual accompaniments of breathing perfumes and dazzling lights, as if—and this was perhaps the case—she had told the monstrous lie until he who is the father of such had persuaded her to believe it.

Having made the tour of the decorations, Bertha stopped before a device which banished all agitation and engaged her mind in higher contemplations. It was simple but suggestive. A cross formed of the living branch of an olive-tree was surmounted by a brooding dove exquisitely carved in wood. The bird held in its mouth a chain of flowers, the other end of which was fastened to the claws of a hawk of the same material, and evidently by the same masterly hand, which stood with half-extended wings at the foot of the cross, haughty and impatient, yet detained by that slender chain.

“Beautiful emblem!” thought Bertha. “May the Dove and the Cross ever retain their power over the cruel and rapacious, but, alas, true symbol of our race!” And then her thoughts wandered to the Christian artist whose genius had devised and executed the emblem ; and she fervently prayed that he and his harmless assistant might be preserved amid the beautiful creations of the outer world, from the superstition and deceit that threw their baneful shadow on all within the convent-walls of Kœnigsfelden Abbey.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE QUINTESSENZE.

Alack, alack, the precious essence shed !
Then Heaven have mercy on the maiden's soul !

WHEN the Archduke Frederick left the young party, after the celebration of mass, at the church-door, it was with the avowed intention of seeking an interview with the Abbot. His humour, however, was changeable that morning ; for, after a few moments' apparent hesitation, he called to his chief groom to bring him his horse, and bidding him inform the Princesses that he had rode slowly homewards, he went forth alone. Avoiding the public road, he entered the deep forest that then skirted it ; and as the melancholy wanderer rode onward, reflecting on the bygone years which the well-known scenes recalled, he let the reins drop on the neck of his horse, and allowed him to choose both the path and pace. The dead stop of the animal, however, roused the muser, and on looking round he found himself exactly in the front of the high rock that closed the entrance to St. Hilda's cave, and his eye rested on the invitation that had proved so acceptable to himself and Bertha a short time before :—

“ TO THE BENIGHTED AND WEARY, WELCOME AND REST.”

“ The benighted and weary,” he softly repeated. “ Who is so deeply bewildered as I ? Who hath more need of rest ? Shall I not find in this holy Hermit a more soothing counsellor than the worldly Abbot ? ”

Then springing from the saddle, he fastened his steed to a tree, bowed his lofty head, and entered the low approach to the cavern. In quitting the sunlit landscape without, it was some time before the rays of the lamp that burnt on the altar

of the subterranean chapel were sufficiently distinct to guide the adventurer's feet into the sanctuary, and when reached, he found it tenantless. Guided, however, by the sound of voices that proceeded from the recluse's inner cell, he gained that apartment which has been already described.

"I will attend to thee, friend, when I have accomplished a weighty business now in hand," said the Hermit, who had heard the approach of the stranger, although the dimly-lighted cell, rendered doubly obscure by columns of smoke and vapour, prevented him from recognizing him.

"Repose thee, whoever thou art, on the bench at the door; or, if thou wouldest escape these suffocating odours, thou may'st await my leisure in the chapel."

Although the steam with which the cell was filled was indeed of a most unsavoury quality, it suited the Archduke's humour to remain. Seating himself, therefore, on the offered bench, under cover of the vapoury veil, he contemplated with no lauguid interest the scene before him. It was such as might have lent a Rembrandt, had such then been found, deeper shades for his dusky canvas.

Over an immense fire of blazing pine-logs hung a cauldron of proportionate dimensions, filled with a boiling, bubbling liquid, whose steam, rushing from the mouth, curled into every corner of the cave, filling it with the effluvia already noticed. A rude retort lay before the fire, into whose spiral tubes the Hermit was endeavouring to force the unmanageable vapour. He was assisted in his undertaking by a younger workman, who, whilst the mechanist was engaged in rectifying the crazy machine, laid log after log on the already blazing fire.

"Have a care, Henga," said the old man; "a little patience, and the steam will find its proper channel. I would our good Swithin were here to inhale its fragrance. See, it begins to drop;" and conveying a drop of the dainty distillery to his lips on the tip of his finger, he added with evident relish, "pungent and odoriferous—the true gusto of the Quinte Essenze!"

"Henga?" thought the Duke, as the flame from the fire before which he leant illumined the flushed cheek and brilliant eye of the boy; "can that possibly be the poor demented grandson of Dame Hedwig?"

And his surprise increased as he watched the grace and energy with which the lad threw fresh logs on the hearth.

"Softly, softly, Henga," hastily exclaimed the Hermit. "I tell thee we have already wood enow for a beacon-fire. The precious mixture distils in streams. Press it too hotly, and the retort will—"

The prognostic was not fully uttered ere it was fulfilled. A loud explosion sent the fragments and contents of the cauldron far and wide; and the affrighted workmen, together with their observer, into the refuge of the sanctuary.

"Thou art not hurt, father?" asked Henga.

"Not a whit, all thanks and praise! and thou, my son? All safe—but the poor maiden! The poison already in her veins, and the Quinte Essenze blown into the air!"

"Thou must haste thee to collect fresh ingredients, whilst I will endeavour to repair the alembic."

"Too late, too late, father!" exclaimed the boy, in a voice of touching pathos, and raising his joined hands in a gesture of despair. "The skull is stripped, the toads are gone into their holes, the day is too far spent. Alack, alack, poor Inna."

As Henga finished this his unusually long outpouring, he discovered the Duke, and the next moment the Hermit was left alone with his illustrious guest, to excuse as best he might his late neglect. The Duke not only condescended to accept the apology made him, but offered one in his turn for his intrusion, and asked many questions about the properties of the odoriferous concoction.

"It is the most powerful antidote in the known *Pharmacopeia*, and, if taken in time, I have known the most noxious poisons ejected before half the draught was swallowed."

No one could have been in a better situation for believing this than one so recently exposed to the foetid effluvia; but neither unbelief nor ridicule would enter into the mind on

such a subject in those dark days, when poison was generally feared, and antidotes held in high esteem. The Hermit's fears were not of the efficacy of his antidote, but from its application having been too long delayed.

"From the symptoms communicated to me," he said, lowering his voice, "I fear the poison has too long lurked in the veins of the poor maiden even for the Quinte Essenzen to expel."

"Poison? Maiden?" repeated the Duke interrogatively. "And did I not hear the name of Inna? Can it possibly be the Princess Bertha's tire-woman of that name for whom you were preparing this nostrum?"

"Thus much I have understood."

"I knew she was sick—but not unto death—from my daughter. This must be inquired further into. Dost thou know aught about it, holy father?"

"But little; and before I relate it, I would entreat your Highness to remove from this stifling vapour into the outer air."

The pair walked silently on through the deep forest until, reaching a rustic bench, the Duke seated himself thereon, and beckoned to his companion to take the place at his side, saying,—

"I have accepted your invitation to the weary and benighted, father, and come to you for guidance and refreshment."

"My Prince has only to demand, and all I can give is his; but," pointing to Koenigsfelden, "absolution must be sought in yonder confessional."

"Nay, thou mistakest: it is not such I came to crave. The last time I knelt at man's footstool was to a lenient judge—the good Father Jeronymo, once our family confessor. Thou doubtless rememberest the cheerful old man, now Prior of St. Gothard?"

"With affectionate regard, we have to this time, through a long lapse of years, kept up a friendly intercourse by this token;" and the Hermit produced a rather bulky packet, hidden in his sleeve, which, as he presented it to the Duke, he

observed, “ The Prior has just despatched me this quaint epistle from his icy throne. I would crave your Highness to consider its contents; and, if it be not too bold, to read them aloud; for age has dimmed my eyes, and I have found them difficult to decipher. Thus much I have learnt, and would make due allowance for, that galless as our jocund friar be, he cannot but feel that he of whom he writes took possession of these rich pastures below, be it by guile or favour, and banished him to the barren heritage of perpetual snows.”

Whilst the Hermit was speaking thus, the Duke had disengaged the MS. from its ligature and cover, and with evident agitation read aloud from its contents as follows:—

“ *To the Hermit Celestine of St. Hilda's*

“ The unworthy Jeronymo, Prior of St. Gothard, sends greeting, wishing his well-beloved brother all health and prosperity.

“ Whereas my thoughts and heart are often occupied with your interests, my reverend brother, I have been for many days looking out for a trusty messenger to convey a few cautions to your ear and ready comprehension. At length, by a token I may not now tarry to explain, I have obtained the trustworthy services of a (so calling himself) lowly pilgrim, who will, I nothing doubt, put this into your hands; since the aforesaid palmer with his companions (a most dainty musicianer and a most careless packman) are travelling your way, to visit, so the deponents say, the Emperor's tomb—*requiescat in pace!*—in Koenigsfelden Abbey. Having explained thus much, I will go on to unfold the purposes of my writing, of which I have two. Imprimis, I want to put thee on thy guard against this new prior whom our holy father—it is not for such as we to inquire why—has put in the room of the lately defunct Benedict. Men say the whole community would have rebelled against the interferance, which suited neither the proud stomach of my Lord Abbot; but, as the cardinal's hat was in the other scale, he consented to receive the Pope's nominee. I hardly think, if he had known who it was to be,

he, Francesco Montolivo, with all his unscrupulous ambition, would have admitted such a serpent into his Eden. And here I come, after much circumlocution, to the pith of my communication, and reveal to you that the new Prior of Koenigsfelden is no other than your old foe the dark Inquisitor Bartolomeo, of whom I bid you beware.

“In reference to the head-covering above alluded to, men say that it has already been despatched from Rome to be worn, with his Holiness’s permission, at the espousals of the son of the King of Naples with the most virtuous and beautiful princess in Christendom; howbeit this is naught but the frothy talk of our passing wayfarers.”

“And as such we will leave it for the present,” said the Duke, returning the letter to its case; “for I have a yet weightier matter to ask thy counsel anent—I allude to my beloved daughter, to whom I am aware the Prior refers.”

The venerable countenance of the Hermit was lit up with an expression of angelic benevolence, as Frederick continued:—

“Before I ask your counsel, reverend father, I will place before you a few circumstances which may not be known to you, and may enlighten you to give it aright. It was the wish of my father, the Emperor Albert, that his eldest grandchild, my Bertha, should espouse the son of his early friend and companion in arms, Henry of Luxemburg, and, but a short time before his ruthless murder, he invited the Prince to his court to celebrate their betrothal. As the Emperor was on the eve of a war, and could spare no time for preparations, the ceremony was private. One only fête was given on the occasion, and that, in accordance with Prince John’s taste, a wild-boar hunt. Owing to some neglected precaution or the extraordinary strength and agility of the animal, the infuriated boar broke through a strong fence that surrounded the booth erected for the Empress and her court; in which the youthful betrothed, then only in her ninth year, occupied a prominent seat—and rushed amongst the terrified spectators. In endeavouring to make her escape with the crowd, but impeded by the cumbrous magnificence of her dress, my poor little Bertha

fell—but, even at this distance of time, I cannot recall her danger without shuddering! Had it not been for the daring bravery of Prince John, who rode foremost in the chase, she must have been trampled beneath the feet of the furious beast.

“Throwing himself from his horse, leaping the barrier at a bound, he stood over the little maiden, and with his single strength kept off its attacking tusks until I, and others arrived to his aid. As he placed the rescued child in my arms, I vowed she should never leave them but for those of her brave preserver, and affianced husband. Alas, what blind proposers we mortals are! Ere a few weeks had passed, the powerful Emperor was laid in a bloody grave, and his early friend became the rival of his son. But let me do justice to Prince John. It is an attribute of Divinity itself to love those who are the most deeply indebted to Him; and thus it was, perhaps, that the image of the little maiden whom he rescued from the tusks of the boar, seems never to have left his memory. In my long and unsuccessful contest with his father, the Emperor Henry; my equally disastrous strife with his successor, Louis of Bavaria; nay, when crown and liberty, all but life and honour were lost; when others deserted the deposed captive,—he never breathed a hint of disloyalty to his engagement. E'en now, as the news of my proposed return has met his ears, I have received the claim of the king-expectant of Bohemia to the betrothed bride of Prince John of Luxemburg.”

“And the Princess, sire?”

“I will now proceed to speak further of her. At the time of her betrothal she had nearly completed her ninth year. Prince John had numbered more than twice as many. Her youth alone would have prevented their immediate marriage, had there been no other barriers. I therefore complied with my sister's vehement desire, in permitting Bertha to be brought up in her convent; for I knew she was as happy there as she could be anywhere, in my unavoidable absences. She was under the superintendence of an accomplished and

amiable preceptress, and enjoyed the companionship of one as gentle and fair as herself."

"A lovely and a loving pair!" interrupted the old man, with glistening eyes. "What pity it were to separate them—But I crave your Highness's pardon!"

The Duke bowed kindly, and went on.

"I will spare thy kind heart the detail of the dark years of war and struggle, of conquest and defeat, in which the imperial crown was placed on my head only to be torn from it. You know them already, and have seen the star of Hapsburg sink lower and lower, and wax dimmer until almost entirely obscured. Ah, father, God is just, but His judgments are fearful! My father's murder, my kinsmen's frantic revenge, followed by a remorse as terrific—the brain of Leopold reeling and on fire; the self-inflicted tortures of Agnes, wasting her health and impairing her senses; and I, a banished man and a captive."

"Nay, my Prince," interrupted the deeply-affected listener, "*you* at least were guiltless. Even to the guilty their Heavenly Father has in judgment remembered mercy, given time for repentance, and some desire for reparation."

"Reparation?" repeated Frederick, in a tone of hopeless despair; and after a short pause he continued, "Wearied by captivity, and weaned from ambition; with a broken constitution and a heart yearning for home and kindred, you will believe how eagerly I accepted the Emperor's proposition for a return to them, for however brief a period. I knew it could not be long; but I should embrace them once more, again, breathe the air of my native mountain, and, above all, fold my Bertha once more to my heart."

"And why should your stay be restricted? Think you, O my Prince, that your loving brethren will ever suffer you to depart?"

"They *will*," answered the Duke almost bitterly, "or call on me for a sacrifice far greater than they are prepared to make. You will believe that my jailer did not open my prison without some stipulation. This was, that my brothers should

give up all claim to the iron crown, which had so painfully galled my brow ; and failing this, I have vowed to return to my prison."

The Hermit made no reply, but his inquiring eye rested on the Duke.

" My brothers received the Emperor's terms with scorn, and his claim on my return with defiance ; and the only boon I can obtain is a short time to determine on what course I shall pursue. But my difficulties do not end here ; these same relatives, kind and helpful in all other matters as they be, oppose with equal vehemence the espousals of their niece with Prince John, whose conduct towards our brother Henry, once his prisoner, they have vowed to revenge ; so that his coming hither would, I fear, peril his liberty, if not his life. Thus you see, reverend father, I am distressed on all sides, and feel almost obligated to consider the only way of escape left me and accept the Emperor's generous offer"—he hesitated a moment—" and according him the hand of my Bertha for his noble son Prince Maurice, is a ransom which would secure my liberty, and I feel also my daughter's happiness."

The Duke paused, waiting for a reply ; but as the Hermit gave none, he continued, whilst a faint blush tinged his marble features, and a slight tone of impatience elevated his musical voice,—

" What counsellest thou, my aged friend ? Surely the eyes which have looked through so long a vista of the past may discover somewhat of the future that is not laid open to common men."

The old man looked with gentle earnestness on the inquirer.

" My son," he said, " experience is the only teacher with whom I can boast a more intimate acquaintance than others, and the past the only clue to my knowledge of the future. This tells me that honesty and integrity are the alone guides that can bring a man peace at the last. Forgive an old man's freedom of speech. I understand your Highness to say that the Princess Bertha was betrothed to Prince John of Luxembourg with your cordial consent ; that, when happily rescued

by his valour, you further ratified that consent by a solemn promise, of which he has since claimed the performance?"

The Duke bowed assent.

"Has there arisen any repugnance?"

"On Bertha's part? Truly not. Without tarnishing her maidenly reserve, I am bound in candour to own that the impression made on her youthful mind, aided perchance by my desire at that time to favour the Prince, but yet more of the solemn view she takes of an engagement—broken, as we well know, as interest sways or policy changes, in every court of Europe—have given him strong claims in her eyes."

"And her heart?"

"Nay, think of her extreme youth."

The Hermit went on, "You further said, my Prince—did you not?—that the Emperor released you on your pledged faith to return, unless you were able to comply with one or other of his stipulations. Your brothers' consent being refused to the one, and your faith to Prince John forbidding the other, what answer can you expect from a servant of the God of Truth—an aged man on the confines of the tomb? My son, resolve the doubt yourself, if any can remain. Be virtuously bold; fulfil your engagement to the betrothed pair, and return unsullied to your prison: you will be happier therein than, with tainted honour and forfeited integrity, on the loftiest throne of earth."

"And this, God helping me, I will do," exclaimed the Duke, with an effort which quickly flagged. He hesitated, and then said, "There is one circumstance, one remark I would make, which, as you are interested in my daughter's happiness, may have weight with you as it has with me. You know not Prince Maurice, know not how much more he is calculated to promote that happiness than—"

The Hermit's calm brow was overcast, and with the dignified sternness which would become a reproving angel, he exclaimed,—

"Beware, my Prince, of the sophistry which allows the

commission of present evil for the pretence of future good, or that which affirms that the end sanctions the means."

"I feel the justice of your rebuke, father; but it would, perhaps, have been more tempered with mercy had you known the heart-consuming misery of captivity."

"And do I not?—I who passed five mortal years in the dungeons of the Inquisition, under the iron rod of the new Prior of Koenigsfelden?"

The Duke shuddered.

"Five years, and thou livest to tell me so?"

"Yea, verily, and to thank my gracious God that He bore me safely through. Starved, tortured, taunted at one time—bribed, flattered, cajoled at another, He suffered not my foot to slip."

"And how didst thou obtain thy release?"

"The human agent was the holiest Pope that ever filled St. Peter's chair—the fifth, the martyr, Celestine."

"And thou bearest his name, and art an inheritor of his virtues. What a lesson hast thou read me, my reverend friend! What is my prison to thine? what my indulgent jailer to thy infernal tormentor? Oh, holy man, how precious do I feel thy honest counsel! But what can the dethroned return but a promise, as far as in him lies, to heed and follow it?"

"And what else could the poor hermit ask? unless it be a promise from his Prince, if such counsel or service as he can give were needed, he will be called on to render them."

"And wouldest thou indeed leave thy blessed St. Hilda?" asked Frederick, as a beam of pleasure shot from his eye. "But no," he added mournfully, "I will not disturb the ebbing sands of thy hour-glass, unless the warning of the wary Jeronymo should induce thee to seek even the poor protection I could give. But no more at present. Thy blessing, father. Fare thee well."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MASKERS UNMASKED.

These be rubies, fairy favours.

HAVE you seen her *hochgeborgene* Von Hompe?" asked the Princess Aletta, as her cousin entered the apartment in which the young ladies were following their usual morning employments. "The tower-bell has sounded the ninth hour at least ten minutes."

"And Madame Punctuality usually enters with the last beat," added the sister. "Hist, Aletta, hist! I hear her puffing up the stairs."

The lady-in-waiting, *plus* the governante, entered the room in a more than ordinary state of excitement. Panting, puffing, glowing, she threw herself on the nearest seat—a three-legged stool of ponderous antiquity, which creaked, nevertheless, beneath the load; and when she had secured her equilibrium and recovered her breath, exclaimed,—

"Well, my royal and noble demoisels, I crave your pardon for being, for *once*, behind my time; but I know you will grant it when you hear the news I bring."

"News! news! oh tell it, tell it!" cried the sisters in a breath; and upsetting the embroidery frame at which they were both at work, "both forming of one flower," each with their hands placed together in the attitude of supplication, said beseechingly,—

"Sweet Hompe, dear Hompe, most kind and communicative Hompe! tell us, is it anent the maskers?"

"Ay, your little Highnesses can 'sweet' me and 'dear' me now you want to get something out of me—but what was I yest're'en, when I was obligated to call the Grand Duchess to—"

"Well, thou pearl of punctuality, and did we not instantly retire?"

"Ay, did we not?"

"Yea, verily, and with good speed when ye heard your royal aunt's footstep in the corridor."

"Oh, we never will be naughty again," promised Aletta; to which Alice added the prudent reserve,

"If you will tell us all you know about the strangers."

"And how know ye that I have aught to tell about them? But ye are a pair of saucy coaxers, and no one can say ye nay. And now, suppose I *do* know something about these would-be musicians, hunters, and the like?" continued the placable gossip, glad of an excuse for delivering herself of the oppressive secret. "And suppose the Lord Chamberlain *has* told me their name and condition; and suppose that, under the rose, I should entrust ye with the secret—with which of the masqueraders shall I begin?"

"With the youngest," "the tallest," "the comeliest," "the noblest," exclaimed the four voices at once; for Bertha and Gertruda had thrown down their needle and book to learn the Baroness's secret.

"The youngest, the tallest, the comeliest, the noblest?" she repeated, determined to make the most of her intelligence. "Why, that must depend mainly on fancy. My Lady Alice might declare for one, as the best favoured, and my Lady Aletta for another."

"Oh no; for we always think alike."

"And here no one *could* differ."

"Then let it be the tallest," interposed the wise Bertha.

"And that would be also the noblest," said Alice.

"And the comeliest," joined in her sister.

"Nay, nay," pleaded Gertruda, "I will, if it so please ye, my ladies, yield the palm in height and good favour, but not in nobleness. It seemed to me *that* belonged to the youngest, and that he bore a strong resemblance—"

"To my father!" exclaimed Bertha. "How I love thee

for the thought, Gertruda ; for as they stood together, I could almost have claimed him for a brother.”

“ And therein, young demoisels,” said the Baroness, with a patronizing smile, “ ye showed your discernment ; for though he drew sounds from the harp and sang as few minstrels can, even when brought up to that go-about trade—and I never before heard of one of high degree doing—yet for all his wondrous skill (howbeit somewhat demeaning to the same), he is of the Hapsburg lineage, being no other than the son of William, Count of Lauffenburg-Hapsburg, Lord of Lauffenburg and Rheinfeling, whose father left his native country in the time of the great Rudolph (who, certes, did not treat him in a cousinly manner), passed into the rude distant country of England ; and having married the heiress of one of the barbarian chiefs, was commanded to drop one half of his noble name or forfeit her estate, the King of that country creating him Lord or Baron Fielding from that time forward ; at which my Lord Chamberlain opineth—”

“ Oh, in pity,” cried the impatient Aletta, “ let the Chamberlain alone to his podagra ! his guesses being generally as lame as—”

“ Nay, sweet my lady,” eagerly interrupted Alice, who saw the rising anger her sister’s remark had kindled, and felt it would but retard the desired communication, “ look not so angrily on poor Aletta ; every one knows that if the right honourable Chamberlain be a little lame, he is not *blind*. Ah, now I see you smile, and I know you will tell us the name of the tallest stranger.”

“ Really, Princesses, ye seem to have taken a very close observation of these masqueraders, and betray a somewhat indecorous interest in their height and favour,” remarked the governante, glad of a plausible excuse for venting the displeasure elicited by the remarks on the Chamberlain’s infirmities.

The sly little gipsies, however, were not to be repulsed, and half in jest, and half in earnest, seized each a plump hand of the Baroness, and promising greater circumspection for the

future, thus banished all resentment from her honest mind. Without further questioning, she proceeded to gratify both herself and listeners by further explanations.

“The tall and, if you will, the comely stranger is a belted Earl from Erin, the Isle of Saints, the birthplace, so I am informed, of the renowned St. Patrick, of whom doubtless he is a descendant, and whose miraculous gifts were kept up in the family. This, one of the present Earl’s forefathers, hight Sir John de Courcy, Earl of Ulster, proved by cutting through a block of marble with his hunting-knife; on which miraculous achievement the King bade him ask what favour he would, even to the half of his kingdom. Thereupon, the wise and noble knight, despising all meaner considerations, demanded permission to wear his hat in the royal presence, which distinction is inherited by the present Earl—though, as the Lord Chamberlain facetiously observed, it is a privilege *he* should be in no haste to claim were he possessed of the same chevelure of raven locks as that young nobleman.”

And *here* Aletta coincided with, and *here* Alice made no objection to the Chamberlain’s remarks, being still further confirmed in her opinion that he was not blind. A soft voice now reminded the Lady von Hompe that she had not revealed the name and station of another of the party, who wore the disguise of an Alpine hunter.”

“Oh, we know all about him already,” said Alice. “Besides, it was no disguise after all, for he is a *real* Swiss bowman.”

“And his name is William Tell. The Chamberlain told us all about his shooting an apple from the head of *his* son.”

“Here,” said the Baroness, with a little hesitation, “for *once* his lordship was somewhat mistaken, only, however, in a trifling miscalculation of years; he having recollected afterwards that the stranger could scarcely have numbered more years than Tell’s son.”

“Maybe he *is* that son?”

“That I cannot say, as his Lordship told me in *confidence* that he knew nothing about his birth or breeding. The Duke having learnt from himself that he was under a vow of

secrecy, had desired that he might not be required to disclose them."

Many were the exclamations of surprise and eager desire to know a secret hidden from the great depositary of court mysteries. It was, however, the expressed opinion of some present that the rustic garb could not conceal the nobility of the wearer.

"Thou art silent, sweet my coz," said Alice, "yet thou hast best right to speak, as it seemed to me thou heldest pleasant converse with him at the banquet."

This sudden appeal startled, but did not disconcert Bertha, who quietly answered, "I am but little conversant with the brave hunters of the Alps, but the bold bearing yet courteous frankness of the stranger seemed to portray them naturally."

Having thus far acquitted herself of her embassy, the Baroness prepared for the grand *coup-d'état*, first calling the attention of her audience to the fact of her having a message of great importance to deliver from the Archduchess, and then enunciating it with proper emphasis and punctilio.

"It being the desire of the Archdukes to pay due honour to their illustrious guests (including an Ambassador just arrived from the King of Naples), a splendid banquet will be given in their honour on the morrow, to which the most renowned and noble of the neighbouring barons, knights, and squires will be bidden. Her Highness the Archduchess, both to pleasure her consort and to pay her share of respect to his visitors, purports to hold a grand court assembly after the banquet, inviting to a participation thereof the ladies of the aforesaid barons', knights', and squires' families. Biddings have been duly despatched far and near, and no doubt the gathering will be both large and distinguished. Her Highness furthermore commends herself to her well-beloved daughter and young kins-women, together with the Fraulein Gertruda, and invites them to appear in her train on this august occasion; and in such guise as beseemeth their age and station.

"And now," added the ambassadress, looking complacently on the bright faces around, "I have executed the orders of

my gracious mistress, and I hope acquitted myself to the satisfaction of my fair charge ; ” and there was a slight unbending as she received their lively acknowledgments, and added, “ I must now attend her Highness, but will hold myself in readiness when you return from your ride, to offer my counsel anent your dress, and— ”

“ One moment, dear Lady von Hompe, ” hastily interposed Alice, arresting the final salutation. “ Do tell us before you go ; shall we be in masquerade, as we were at the banquet ? ”

“ Certainly not ! How could you suppose such a thing ? ”

“ I suppose Alice is thinking how otherwise we are to make a befitting appearance.”

“ That is a consideration, sister mine ; but I rather meant the question as concerns the strangers. Will they not appear as before ? ”

“ Fie, fie, my Lady Alice ! What ! come to a court ball in such low guise as that ? ”

“ Pray tell me how they can help it.”

“ I could explain all about it, and will, if you will both promise— ”

“ All and everything.”

“ I will be as sage as Bertha.”

“ And I as obedient as Gertruda.”

The good-humoured Baroness shook her head, but nevertheless proceeded to unburthen herself, and enlighten her hearers as follows :—

“ You must know, my demoisels, royal and noble, that some little while ago the hostelry of the Hawk, at Brigg, was besieged by a host of young varlets clad mostly in green doublets and red hoses, their caps adorned with chains and feathers, and attended by a troop of mules and muleteers. Some of the beasts were laden with baggage, and all belonged to our merry maskers ; so that there is no fear of a want of proper braveries for the ball. I doubt not, the varlets laughed in their slashed sleeves—as they trotted along on their mules, or caroused at their masters’ cost at the best hostceries—at the folly of those masters to prefer trudging

over rough paths and begging a night's lodging wherever they could find one."

"Folly!" exclaimed Alice disdainfully. "I deem this contempt of mere creature comfort a proof of their gentle nurture, and true knighthood."

"And so do I," echoed Aletta; "and if I were a knight I would always travel in disguise. What sport it must be, Alice, to dress like a pedlar and sell your own wares!"

"Then you must keep a good look out on your pack, remember."

The sisters here interchanged a laughing look that betrayed the peep they had taken into one.

"Now, it seemeth to me," said Gertruda, "that the disguise most becoming to a lofty spirit is that of a minstrel; since it more than repays the hospitality it craves; then, think of the high delight it gives and the noble lessons it reads."

"Softly, fair lady!" said Bertha. "The harp, the mantle, and the badge will not make a minstrel any more than the feathers of the peacock will make a nightingale. The qualifications of our bard came from another source. My father, who has listened to the most noted at the board of kings, says their music knocked not so persuasively at his heart as the strains of our cousin—I glory in calling him such! The minstrel's vocation is a gift, not a disguise: if it could be donned, I believe I should fall in with Aletta's humour, and always go about in masquerade."

"Well, settle it as you like, my demoisels," said the Lady von Hompe, to whom this erratic discourse was not very interesting or comprehensive, "*My* opinion is that knights and earls should be habited as such, and not like mummers; for, as the Lord Chamberlain most divertingly observeth, 'Let them beware of jumping out of their skins, lest, in the change about, they may not get the right one to jump back into.'"

"Now this sparring about disguises warns me," said Alice, "that I fear Aletta and I shall be obliged to return to ours;

for, verily, we have no vestments new or rich enough for this grand occasion, when the least of the barons' or even squires' ladies will put us to shame."

"Unless Sister Eva will lend us St. Klare's new robe of Genoa velvet," began Aletta, but was interrupted by a "Fie, fie!" from the governante, who sailed out of the apartment, with an apology of important business for not attending at the morning's ride; and a patronizing assurance that the subject of the ball dresses should be discussed between them on their return.

The door was scarcely closed on the portly lady ere it was opened by a servant, to announce that the horses waited in the Castle court, which summons sent the young party to their rooms to prepare for the mount. It is, however, but justice to the propriety of our mediæval maidens to add that there was no need of the governante's lessons to suggest that, since their puzzling *myth* had become a tangible reality, the subject was not a befitting theme for young, still less for royal discussors. Of this reticence our younger and more frolicsome Princesses were equally observant. Perhaps, at the bottom of their dear little hearts, there was a vague sense of disappointment at the prosaic interpretation of their dreams—for *prosaic* it was to them, who had been accustomed from their cradle to the homage of stranger earls, and far-off cousins. But for a certain misty charm cast over the Isle of Saints, the descent from St. Patrick, and the great stone-cutter; as well as the distinguished privilege of wearing a covering when most persons would be glad to dispense with one, the whole of the Baroness's revelations would have made but little impression on this part of her audience.

Dame Blandina had been engaged by the overtasked lady-in-waiting to accompany and take care of her lively charge, and they found her already mounted on Mignon. She had her page-in-waiting: not Henga, we may be sure, whom such an association would have sent into the depths of forest tangle; but a jaunty, shrewd scrap of a boy about half his age and height, and as different in all other respects as two species of

the genus *homo* could be. We have already made Hans's acquaintance; but how can we expect little Hans, with his pitcher of broth and his little pot of *confitures* for his grandame's phthisic, could be traced in the smart, consequential page, clad in doublet of black and yellow, his *nez-retroussé* air rendered yet more saucy by a cap with gold band and tassels stuck jauntily on one side, and raised by his thick and short curly hair at least an inch from his giddy pate?

The metamorphosis was effected thus. The phthisic, in spite of Sister Eva's soup and sweetmeats, was too strong for the old grandame, and she died, leaving poor little Hans without one relative, and but one friend in the world; but she was a staunch and powerful one, and stood by him in his adversity. The story of his helpless state, as related by Sister Eva, prevailed more than the enumeration of his wondrous qualities to gain Blandina's consent to undertake his education for the office of page to her lady; a task rendered easy by the boy's versatile talents; and agreeable, in spite of her better judgment, by his wit and ingenuity.

After a pleasant ride over a wide plain studded with abrupt hills and ruined-crowned rocky eminences, they arrived at the foot of one higher and more rugged than any of its fellows; and here, resigning their palfreys into the hands of their attendants, the young party, with Hans as their guide, proceeded to scale the mount, leaving Blandina at its foot with the provender, which she engaged to spread on the grass ere their return.

The enormous pile of ruins on the summit, now little more than heaps of huge stones, had once been a considerable fortress, built by the Romans to defend their beautiful city of Vandonissa spread over the plain below. In the lapse of ages, the genius of another race had chosen other builders for the gigantic edifice, and other hands than those of the polished rulers of the world to convey the immense blocks of stone up that steep ascent. These romantic legends drew frequent visitors to the Swiss Drachenfels, to some of whom—the hut of his grandame being hard by—our shrewd little Hans

had acted as guide. On this occasion he outdid himself, adding to the sufficiently strange history of the giant's exploits, adventures almost as wonderful, though of a merrier nature, which had befallen himself: such, for instance, as his being enticed into the midst of a dangerous bog by a hideous phantom with one fiery eye; and at another time kept running round and round his granddame's little meadow, until he recollect ed her admonition to turn his doublet inside out. Then he related stories of munificent gifts made by the little people to those who had the fortune to surprise them at their gambols—probably, Hans imagined to bribe them not to disclose their retreat; and he hinted that if the party could stay till the moon rose, there was little doubt of their getting a share of these fairy gifts.

They had, however, already staid long enough to alarm Blandina. Time had slipped by unperceived whilst scrambling amongst the ruins, and listening to the eloquent historian of their wonderful inhabitants; so that, in their haste to overtake the inexorable fugitive, poor Bertha sprained, or in some wise hurt her foot. She concealed the false step from her nurse, that she might not sadden or curtail the merriment of they party. Hans's wondrous legends were freely discussed as they partook of their simple repast, he and Blandina remaining to wait. At length the former, pointing to the declining sun, warned her charge that it was time to return to the Castle, reminding them of the Baroness's invitation to a council on ball-dresses; and she added a little bo-peep fun not quite hidden beneath her grave demeanor.

“It is a pity that Hans has not made ye known, my ladies, to his fairy friends, and engaged them to weave ye each a robe of gossamer threads, bedecked with dewdrop diamonds. Thinkest thou, boy, if we leave thee here till the moon rises thou could'st manage this little matter for us?”

The proposal at first a little confused poor Hans, but his ready wit came to the rescue.

“That would I most readily, Dame Blandina, if you will bide with me: for fairies will not be entreated by proxy.

To gain their favour you must ask it for yourself, and not another."

The proposal that they should *all* stay and present their petitions in person was made rather as a matter of merriment than serious request; though it was easily seen that, beneath this laughing incredulity, there lurked a belief in the marvellous sufficient to give it poignancy and interest.

The party reached the Castle gates just as the short autumnal evening had closed in. They found the Baroness at the bottom of the great staircase, which she mounted with them, almost in silence and shade. At the folding-doors leading into the Princess Bertha's outer apartment were congregated several tire-maidens, who fell back respectfully as the lady-in-waiting, advancing a few steps, threw open the folding-doors and discovered a scene so magically bright that, to the dazzled eyes of those who looked on, it seemed nothing less than the creation of those fairies whose regions they had just visited. For, lo! displayed in cabinets of ebony and ivory, hung four robes of gossamer web, such as Blandina had desired from them, dazzling with dewdrops of every colour and water.

The kind fay who had thus forestalled their wants and wishes, sat by to enjoy their surprise, and subsequently to receive their embraces and thanks; and we query if their unaffected astonishment and delight did not afford him more heartfelt pleasure than the proud admiration with which he, the next evening, beheld his lovely nieces attired in the befitting dresses his taste and generosity had provided for them.

But who would have guessed that the "wise Albert" should have constituted himself master of the robes? unless, indeed, as we all know, wisdom is shown as much in the little as the great; and on this occasion the kind uncle had wise reasons for obeying the dictates of his generous heart. He was not ignorant of the loss his especially-beloved Bertha had sustained, though he probably knew nothing of the subsequent history of her missing vest, and he determined on making it up to her. Then came the meagre resources of his other nieces to be aided, and then Gertruda's wants to be cared for.

Alas, poor Gertruda! did she penetrate into the hidden meaning of the gift; did she see that in thus providing her a dress for the morrow's festival, the kind donor had contemplated that *one* other occasion on which she should need it? Doubtless she did, or else why should tears dim her soft eyes, whilst those of all around sparkled with glee.

These fairy gifts have placed the chronicler in a great dilemma. Why did not Albert, as from his *sobriquet* might have been expected, hand down his mantua-maker's, or, more properly speaking, tailor's bill? Some account of these mediæval robes is due to the taste and generosity of the giver, and the curiosity of some of the readers; and we give it, deprecating all criticism, and asking indulgence for our ignorance of the idiom of the work-room. It is a great relief to find, that in material and form, the dresses of the four young ladies were exactly alike, varying only in their colour and the device of the ornaments. The tint of those to be worn by the sister Princesses was evidently chosen in reference to their Italian style of complexion, dark hair and eyes— inherited from their mother, a Princess of Savoy—whilst the hue of those selected for Bertha and her friend harmonized with their fairer and more northern shade of beauty. Each robe was of a light transparent tissue, crossed (we are now confining our description to the dresses of the younger Princesses) with gold thread; the upper dress opened from the waist, gradually rounding off to the train, which, for the convenience of dancing, was looped up with wreaths of heartsease most delicately fabricated. This suggestive flower was chosen, not without design, as the device of the light-hearted sisters, and was embroidered in gold and purple on the front of their rich under-dress. But it was yet more tastefully displayed in a wreath of precious stones, made of amethysts and topazes in the graceful form of the flower, with emerald leaves; leaving it to the taste of each fair wearer, or her tire-maiden, to place it where it would sparkle most among the tresses it was formed to adorn.

Bracelets and necklace of pearl, clasped with the same

device, and a brooch to correspond, fastening one of the most natural yet artistical tiny bouquets of this most favourite of blossoms, complete our description of the uncle's fairy gift.

We said, what further consideration obliges us to recall. The heartsease is not the *most* favourite of flowers; that chosen for the emblem of Bertha and her sister friend is at least a sharer in its popularity—the lovely blue “Forget-me-not;” and if we substitute this flower for its rival, exchanging silver for gold, and turquoise and diamonds for the other precious stones, all further enumeration will be superfluous.

Nothing could have been better chosen than the emblems and colours of each pair of the destined wearers; and it is but justice to Blandina and the Baroness to add, that they were taken into the Archduke's council, and were the principal agents in this momentous affair. Nor should the poor nuns of St. Klare be deprived of their meed of praise; since the almost living flowers were formed by their plastic fingers: a beautiful art this, in which nuns of all ages have been adepts. A melancholy one, too, for those who might doubtless remember scenes in which their own bright tresses were entwined with such like festal garlands. More sad still, when memory would recall the fragrant gardens, green knolls, and shady woods from which they must never again pluck their dew-besprinkled blossoms.

But all was not painless, even on that red-letter evening, in the Castle. Poor Bertha bore up courageously, but was very glad to retire to her own room to free her aching, throbbing foot from restraint, and resign it into the hands of Blandina, who was a good doctor as well as nurse, as, indeed, most women were in those days. Still, she failed to discover any serious injury. There was certainly no broken bone or violent sprain. The little foot was swollen, and somewhat inflamed; but both doctor and patient had great faith in a decoction of fragrant herbs to which they had immediate recourse. The remedy was all but magical in assuaging the pain, and, consequently, allaying the anxiety naturally felt by Bertha lest it might

have incapacitated her from taking a part in the events of the half-dreaded, half-anticipated morrow. Happily, the soothing effect of the nurse's remedy, and her stringent enforcement of silence on the exciting incidents of the past day, had the happy effect of driving them from all but the dreams of her charge.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A COURT BALL OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

The course of true love never did run smooth.

ABOUT the hour when the fashionable ladies of our nineteenth century are taking their ride, walk, or drive in the parks, or completing their shopping in Regent Street—or that more delightful one of luxurious ease in the country, when, sipping their preliminary cup of tea after the rural excursion or stroll, they are scanning the pages of the last popular novel, or the newspaper of the moment, before entering on the business of the evening toilette. Just at that hour, or even earlier, our great dames of the olden time were arriving at the Castle-court of Hapsburg, from all the castles, towers, and feudal forts in its neighbourhood.

This fair gathering, as we have already seen, was at the bidding of the Archduchess, and nothing was wanting on the part of the guests, and by the splendour of their attire, to do honour to the happy occasion that had called them together—namely, the return of their justly-beloved Prince. How little did they anticipate the thunder-clouds which were so soon to veil the transient sunshine!

But we are recalled to describe our assembly of the by-gones: a court ball, somewhat diverse in elegance and luxury from those of our Victoria, but nevertheless graced by much that was illustrious and beautiful, and animated, we conclude, by much the same hopes, fears, desires, and disappointments. No doubt, the Countess von der Rapenstein Klingenthal was as desirous to find suitable matches for the Ladies Hildegarde, Vereina and Bridget von der Rapenstein, as the Right Honourable mothers of the Ladies Blanches and Beatrices of the British aristocracy. No doubt the young heiress of Ringot-

lingen was as haughty and capricious as the heiress of a Yorkshire Baronet. As little, that the reigning Beauty of the neighbourhood, amid her hosts of bowers and sighers, threw her lures and her glances as adroitly at the wealthy, and somewhat antiquated, Pasgrave von Todenwasser Rottenburg as—But our business is with loves of yet higher destiny.

We have already hinted at the limited establishment of the Court of Hapsburg, and though the Lady-in-waiting physically occupied the space of two, and the Chamberlain, by his wonderful faculty of adaptation, was of more official service than half a dozen equerries, yet it was a charming thought of the young Princesses to merge their own identity, and contribute to the splendour of the Archduchess's retinue by ranging themselves as attendants round her chair of state. If the assertions of history are to be depended on, that we shall in no age or country find more personal beauty than in the family of the House of Hapsburg at this period, we can but believe that these fair members of it, with the addition of the beautiful Novice, must have formed a charming group.

As family after family arrived, the Lord Chamberlain presented them in due degree; and each with such a multiplicity of titles, offices, and designations as, like the Spanish Hidalgo, would have perilled their admission into any hotel of moderate dimensions; but,

"Ye common people of the skies,
What are ye when the sun doth rise?"

The Chamberlain was cut short in the midst of one of his heraldic ramifications by the entrance of the Dukes Frederick, Leopold, and Albert, followed by the newly-returned strangers, whom Frederick compassionately rescued from this German Burke, by introducing them himself, in a more laconic yet quite as lucid a style, to the presiding lady and her attendant nymphs.

"Duchess," he said, gracefully bowing, "I would claim permission to present to your Highness the Duke of Castelmare,

Ambassador from his Majesty the King of Naples. I crave, further, your favourable reception of our well-beloved cousin, the Knight of Lauffenburg-Hapsburg; claiming also your consideration for the noble Earl de Courcy, son of our brother Leopold's earliest and well-esteemed brother in arms. Furthermore, I present one as noble and as valiant as his honourable compeers; but who is at present under a vow of concealment, into which we do not pry."

Then raising his eyes towards the bright group standing by, he added, "My noble guests, let me also present to you my daughter, the Princess Bertha; my nieces, the Princesses Alice and Aletta, and the Novice Gertruda of Koenigsfelden."

Never was there an introduction of such various interests so aptly concentrated!

The ladies comported themselves with royal dignity, mingled in the younger ones with maidenly reserve; the knights, with a respectful devotion worthy that of the "Round Table," bowing down to the ground, and scarcely raising their eyes to the fair beings before them.

The music shortly striking up, Leopold presented a hand of each of his daughters to the two younger knights (the Incognito having declined dancing), and would have taken that of his niece to open the ball with him; but, alas, notwithstanding Blandina's skill, the foot was not yet sufficiently recovered to bear such an exertion, and the Duke led out Gertruda.

And here, to meet an objection that may be started to his choice of one so comparatively humble amongst such a distinguished circle, we would explain that in the Romish Church of those days the intended "brides of Heaven," so called, were allowed the brief distinction of precedence accorded to the mundane bride by the etiquette of our own times.

Nor was it deemed unbecoming her sacred destination if the novice partook of the pleasures of the world, although at the eve of separation from it and them. Thus, too, in those dark ages the famished prisoner, sentenced to die on the morrow,

was placed at the richest banquet, of which he, like the doomed captive of the cloister, often partook with relish.

When the first dance was ended, the royal party gathered round the chair of Albert, which was placed where he could command a view of the festive scene that he enjoyed with benevolent sympathy, pointing out to the Neapolitan Ambassador, who stood at his side, the principal personages in the assembly.

When Leopold approached with his youthful partner, the "wise" Albert rallied him for usurping such, whilst younger men were standing idle, and reminded him that, as a host, he should make himself agreeable to the bonny wives and daughters of his guests, adding, with a smile,—

"A word to the wise, brother mine."

"Rather *from* the wise," replied Leopold. "Come here, Lauffenburg, I will make over to you the right of challenging the whole world in favour of your partner's grace and beauty."

On hearing this sportive defiance, the Neapolitan courtier, as he led off Aletta, threw down his glove in the same mood, which De Courcy playfully picked up, vowing to proclaim to all Christendom, and to support the same with lance and sword, the superior charms, courtesy, and renown of the Lady Alice.

Whilst this little scene was passing, Albert had detained De Lauffenburg at his side for a few minutes, during which the dancing had begun. Not sorry, perhaps, to exchange it for a quiet *tête-à-tête*, he led Gertruda to a seat to await a pause, and remained standing at her side, leaning against one of the supporting pillars of the spacious hall.

"I have long wished," he said, with somewhat of diffidence, "for an opportunity, fair Princess—and, may I not add, kinswoman?—of returning my poor acknowledgments to you for this most precious gift;" and he pressed to his lips, with as devout an air as if it had been a holy relic, the chain that hung round his neck.

It was that given by Leopold, and placed there, as has been

related, by Gertruda in her guise as Princess on the evening of the banquet.

Gertruda blushed; nay, how should she not, feeling called on her for an explanation embarrassing to her shrinking nature? Nevertheless, she assumed courage to reply thus:—

“I may not take to myself thanks that are due to another: the gift, or rather guerdon, was bestowed by Duke Leopold.”

“But it was his fair niece who gave it tenfold value by deigning to hang it round the neck of one so little worthy of her condescension.”

Poor Gertruda must certainly have been strangely bewildered; for instead of saying in plain and simple words—“I am not the Princess Bertha, but a poor novice of Koenigsfelden, only we exchanged dresses on that evening,” she made the puzzle yet more puzzling by saying,—

“Your pardon, sir knight, if I say you are mistaken in the person to which you owe so slight a favour.”

“Mistaken! As well, lady, may you tell me I cannot discern between yon lamp and the noonday sun. Nay, you smile at your vain attempt to deceive me. It was you, and *you* alone, my fair kinswoman, who placed this chain where it shall hang for aye.”

Gertruda *did* smile; nay, she almost laughed with nervous embarrassment, as she made an awkward attempt to get out of the maze into which it had plunged her.

“I fear you will deem me uncourteous if I only verify one half your assertion,” she said. “I did present the chain you wear, but it was—”

“I know—the gift of your uncle.”

“Nay, not so.”

“Was it, then, your own gracious thought, my kindest as well as fairest cousin? Nay, do not deny it! Let me beseech you, distract me no longer!”

And the poor poet's look was so supplicatory and forlorn that Gertruda now tried in earnest to allay his perplexity by asking with a decided emphasis,—

“Does it not occur to you, sir knight, that there were

other maskers than yourself and your companions around that festal board—others who might not be what they seemed?"

The cloud did not at once roll off the bard's countenance; but when at length it gradually dispersed and his mind caught the truth, that expressive face became radiant with joyful intelligence.

"I see it!" he cried; "I now divine the whole truth. You are not the Princess Bertha, not the betrothed of another. Oh, fairest lady, tell me, then, who are you? Where may I seek you? In what neighbouring castle or more distant home? Castle or cottage, it matters not, so I may hope to find it—be it at earth's extremest verge. Where, *where* is the favoured home adorned by so much excellence?"

Poor Gertruda's smiles had vanished. Although the tenor of the speech was much such as was addressed to all ladies in those romantic days, yet there was a deeper meaning in the tone of that musical voice, and the expression of those poet eyes that caused her great distress; and the thought of the only home she should ever call hers on earth roused her to the necessity of undeceiving one, whom woman's instinct taught her was but too seriously interested in her destiny. Thus roused, the heroism of her character overcame its bashfulness.

"The only home I shall ever possess a right to call such, sir knight," she said calmly, "admits no visitors. But, to explain a mistake into which you have fallen, and that very naturally, I will inform you that, on the evening of the banquet, the Princess, and other ladies, having determined on appearing in masquerade guise, it was agreed that I should don that of the Lady Bertha, and sit in her place at the board; but—" and here her voice slightly trembled—"ours was but a simple exchange, for she wore mine."

"And tell me, fair lady, by what token I shall recall the Lady Bertha to my mind?"

"By a beauty and grace that outshone all compeer," said Gertruda, still hesitating on the threshold of the painful disclosure.

“Nay, then, I did *not* notice her.”

“Pardon me; it was from *her*, the beautiful nun who sat nearest my Lord Abbot, you received, and dutifully acknowledged, the theme of your song.”

Oh, woe, woe, to the glowing hopes, the bright anticipations of that poet heart!

His countenance, in which every emotion of his heart was mirrored, changed like the summer evening sky when a cloud passes over the setting sun.

“And that melancholy dress?” he asked.

“Is *mine*; destined in a few days to be exchanged for one you may deem yet more sad.”

“This, then, is the meaning of Albert’s caution. I thought only of the betrothment of the Princess Bertha.”

But the burst of sorrowful and indignant feeling which was rising to the minstrel’s lips was checked by the sudden stop of the music, and the nearing approach of Alice and Aletta, with their partners and governante.

Soon, too, there was a general movement in the assembly, occasioned by the entrance of a troop of liveried retainers bearing massive silver salvers piled with refreshments, viands and cordials suited to mediæval tastes and appetites.

The ladies were handed to their seats by their cavaliers, and served by them with ceremonious homage (often on one knee), with delicacies as tempting, and certainly less adulterated, than any furnished by the most celebrated sugar and pastry *artistes* of our day.

But we must now return to our heroine *par excellence*, whom we left at her step-mother’s side, fulfilling one of the duties of the *dual* officed lady-in-waiting. Whilst replying to the elaborate courtesies of her elder guests, the Archduchess took no notice of her daughter, except to provide her a seat.

Thus left unmolested, Bertha indulged the quick-coming fancies that crowded on her mind, when a voice, whose tone was neither unknown nor unexpected, fell on her ear amid the din of the music and the tread of the dancers.

"Does the fair Novice of Koenigsfelden abstain from the dance from inclination or duty?" asked the intruder.

"From neither. It is necessity which keeps me aloof," she replied, but without further explanation.

The stranger bowed with graceful ease as he said,—

"I fear I must own myself selfish enough to rejoice in what all else are deplored—not, indeed, if your wishes are with the dancers."

"No, verily, I little affect the pastime."

"And that is strange in one so formed to excel in it, and of years most ready to enjoy it."

"On the contrary, it is perfectly natural to one, as I have been, schooled in the shade and stillness of a cloister to shrink from noise and glare. But, may I not ask, in my turn, why you eschew the dance?"

"Certainly not, fair lady; for the reasons *you* plead. Setting aside the object I have at present for declining it, my usual indifference to such amusements arises probably from habits of more serious occupation. Reared amid the din of war, the jar of hostile factions, and the higher aim of ambition, I feel no sympathy with the mummeries of grown-up children. I learn, too, from animal nature, that such gambols are only graceful in the very young. Nothing is more winsome than the frolics of the lamb and the curvets of the kitten; but it falls not in with my humour to see an old grimalkin jump at a cork tied to a string." And the speaker's eye dilated with irresistible mirth as it turned on the Baroness von Hompe, who presented no unapt personification of the comic simile.

Bertha smiled, but added apologetically—

"There are some natures that retain their youthful simplicity long after their youthful years. Let us leave the artless-minded Baroness to what, to her, are innocent pleasures."

"And are not such innocent pleasures to all who can delight themselves therewith?"

"Perhaps not to those who are called to more serious duties."

“ You allude to those of a religious profession; yet I question whether the pirouettes of the sportive old lady before us are not more innocent, and certainly more inartificial, than your conventional genuflexions, and—Nay, hear me, dearest lady! It may be the only opportunity vouchsafed me of addressing a word of warning—of entreaty. Were it not to risk the drawing on you the gaze of those around, I would implore you on my bended knee—nay, I would lie at your feet until you promised me you would not blight your earthly weal, mayhap your eternal hopes, by immolating yourself in the Abbey of the Queen of Hungary.”

Bertha answered not. She was earnestly praying for wisdom to discern her right path, and strength to choose it. The truthfulness of her nature revolted against further concealment, and her heart and wishes too truly sympathized with it; but her lover continued,—

“ You do not speak,” he said, in a low earnest tone. “ I vow to Heaven, had I any pretension to such a service, I would drag you from the altar, and assert it before God and man. But no, noblest maiden, that blest privilege is not, *cannot* be mine. Yet thus much I may and do claim, as a true knight sworn to defend all who suffer wrong. If—and every look, every word has proved to me that you are forced to pronounce unwilling vows—you want help in your hour of need—promise me you will deign to look to me as your defender—oh, promise me, gracious lady, you will not accord to any other that blessed privilege!”

This turn in the conversation was a relief to Bertha; and though she did not raise her eyes to the eloquent pleader, she felt that this request she might harmlessly grant, and she did so with a tolerably composed acknowledgment of the proffered assistance. To this she would have added, or at least tried to add, some explanation that might have calmed her lover’s apprehensions, without absolutely betraying her secret; but whilst she hesitated, the opportunity, if not the power, of explanation was no longer hers. This acceptance of services, so vehemently and so sincerely tendered, was acknowledged with

an air and tone of chivalrous devotion, which soon changed to those of melancholy.

“Then, here we part, beauteous lady; yet, ere I am banished from your presence, I would supplicate the boon of a few minutes’ audience. I would, as I conceive both honour and truth call on me to do, explain to you why I come hither in disguise, and conceal my name and state.”

Bertha bowed assent, for she felt how vain would be any attempt to speak it.

“The thought that I should in your eyes appear light of love, or failing in honour and truth, is to me insupportable, and urges me to a disclosure—to trouble you with what perchance you may deem me presumptuous for supposing you would feel any interest in hearing.”

Perhaps the speaker discerned in Bertha’s looks—for she still continued silent—a contradiction to this diffident supposition, for he continued,—

“I have already confessed to you that the din of war and the lures of ambition rendered me indifferent to the allurements of pleasure, as men usually understand the term. My confession was true, but it was not entire. I possessed a yet more effective talisman—a guardian angel, in the constant recollection of a lovely child to whom I was betrothed in early youth. She was my protection amid the fierce heat of the battle, and the revels of the feast; and when my wildest dream of ambition was realized, I thought only of her to share my laurels with me. It was an ill-judged frolic, of which I now see the folly, and feel the punishment; but my whim was to join some brothers in arms, who were bound for this Castle of Hapsburg, and see with my own eyes how this bud of promise had expanded into bloom, ere I craved to bear it from the parent tree.”

Bertha’s heart beat with painful quickness; but though the pause made by the narrator asked for some reply, she could only raise her eyes with an expression which was not misunderstood.

“I see the question you would ask is, whether my expec-

tations were answered? Thus far they were exceeded: the expanded flower was even more beautiful than the half-closed bud, and all men speak of its fragrance, too; but there bloomed another at its side, in my eyes more beauteous, more fragrant—and, strange to say, more like my child-bride. Am I, then, excused? Action is ours; but love, preference, destiny, are beyond the control of the wisest."

He stopped, unable to proceed; and Bertha, whose cheek now pale, now glowing, betrayed almost equal agitation, still felt impelled to break the intolerable silence by a question she could herself (and doubtless the reader) have answered. She felt its folly as soon as it had passed her quivering lips.

"You ask the name of my betrothed bride? The Princess Bertha of Hapsburg."

Three words—" *I am she!* "—three little monosyllables rose to her lips. Should she pronounce them? Should she by their utterance secure her lover's, and, alas, as she too truly felt, all she had anticipated of human happiness; and thus rivet, perhaps for ever, her father's chains? Yet the struggle was intense.

Reader, can you not remember words, uttered or suppressed, as closely connected with your destiny, as those three little words were with that of our heroine? We shall see in the course of our tale how the utterance of them would have changed her future life; we shall see, too, whether she regretted this sublime reticence. At the moment they seemed too hazardous to be spoken; the parted lips through which they struggled gave out no sound; but her ear caught that of a low mournful "farewell." She turned round; he who had breathed it was gone, and his place was filled by the Abbot Montolivo.

"Have a care, daughter!" said he sternly, "lest these love passages with errant knights compromise the dignity of your house."

The blood of that house rushed, not, as was wont with transient emotion, or as

"The orient blush of quick surprise,"

but in a crimson flood into the cheek of the Princess, suffusing

even her forehead and neck ; and with an unusual and, considering the apparent grounds for the reproof, unreasonable indignation, she replied,—

“ You are harsh and unjust, my Lord Abbot.”

“ And art not thou disrespectful, my daughter ? Who but the spiritual director of your untainted honour has the right to watch over even the appearance of aught that might compromise its lustre ? ”

“ If I have appeared in any ways to merit your rebuke, or ungrateful for your watchfulness, my Lord, accept my sorrowful apology. In a right time and place, I will explain all that has seemed unbecoming in my conduct.”

“ So be it : and that time shall be sought as soon as may be.” This was uttered in the dignity of office, but the Prelate’s manner relaxed as he continued,—“ Why, my daughter, do I not see you with those of your young age mingling in the amusements suited to it ? Singularity in youth is as snow in summer, blighting and unwelcome.”

Bertha raised her hurt foot from its supporting cushion. Placed near its slight companion, the Abbot was really alarmed at its swollen appearance, and exclaimed with unaffected concern,—

“ You must seek rest and remedy at once, dear daughter. How did this happen ? ”

“ A false step. In coming down the Drachenfelsburg yestreen, I heedlessly put my foot into a pitfall of dried leaves. Blandina, as we thought, cured it last night, and it is only since I have been in the ball-room that it has swollen into this uncomely size.”

“ And this should teach you that you are not strong enough to go alone. Consent, therefore, I pray you, for once to be guided, ay, and supported by me. We will ask her Highness’s leave to retire.”

Assisting his sometimes refractory, yet nevertheless admired and beloved pupil, to the door of her apartment, the Abbot gave Blandina directions for the treatment of the injured foot : first to set it free from slipper and hose, and then foment it with

what she had already applied with success—a strong decoction of the favourite remedies of the mediæval Pharmacopœia—marjoram, mint, rosemary, sage, lavender, elder—names breathing healing and fragrance. Ah, well would it have been if their gentle influences had never been set aside for drugs whose very names are poisons, whose indiscriminate use has banished the rose from the cheeks, and destroyed the pearls in the mouths of our young beauties!

The cultivating, gathering, drying and distilling aromatic herbs have, even to the borders of the present century, been a pleasant occupation of simple housewives and Lady Bountifuls. There may yet be a few who can remember the fragrant task—more who can recall the steaming, dropping still, either in their own housekeeper's room, or in the cottage of some old Dorcas famed for her rose and elder-flower waters. But even our perfumes, nowadays, are the same unnatural combinations as every other concoction; and we dare not penetrate into the chemist's laboratory any more than into the wine merchant's, the brewer's, the butcher's and the baker's workshops.

“Tis seening all.”

If some of the more prominent vices of bygone centuries have been banished, there is—for such we believe to be the leading one of the present—a deep, deep deception that runs at the root of everything, into every stratum of society, under every institution, beneath every public association, gnawing and sapping the old British oak. The great deficiency of the present state of highly-civilized life is what must be expected to spring from such a want of *simplicity*. Our children are not simple. Our poor are not simple.

Nevertheless, that lovely virtue, banished from all other grades, has sought, and received a refuge with the highest, the *very* highest. Why cannot her loving subjects copy, as well as admire, the example of their simplicity-loving Queen?

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HEALING ART.

Who hath learned lowliness
From his Lord's cradle, patience from His cross ;
Whom poor men's eyes and hearts consent to bless ;
To whom for Christ the world is loss.

EVEN in the dawn of the most engrossing, perhaps the most selfish of feelings, the heart of our heroine was alive to other interests than her own. It was this rare and beautiful characteristic that, as Blandina tenderly administered the Abbot's prescription, roused her from the delicious dream of a first love, and the reality of being beloved for herself alone, to her nurse's recommendation of an application to the Leech.

"Willingly," she replied ; "it will be an opportunity of learning tidings of poor Inna which we may not let slip. For myself, Dr. Blandina always suffices for my ailments."

Blandina smiled through her tears, for she had skill enough to know that her mistress's present ailment was of no light nature ; for, however bravely she tried to conceal it, her countenance betrayed the anguish she endured.

The anxious father soon arrived, and sent immediately for assistance ; but the Leech had been called to a distant patient, and was not expected to return before the morning. The fomentations were continued, but gave only transient ease ; and Bertha passed a restless, almost sleepless, night. It was therefore to the Duke's and Blandina's infinite relief, as well as to the great satisfaction of the patient, that Herr Baumgarten arrived early the next morning : "a man of healing" in the true sense of the word, an embodiment of all that is noble and philanthropic in a profession whose essence is charity, whose true disciples—and there are many such treading, as far as human weakness will permit, in the footsteps of the Great

Exemplar—administer to the mental as well as bodily ailments of suffering humanity. Such a one was Herr Baumgarten, a fine venerable looking man of sixty, with a countenance indicative both of sense and benevolence. After examining the patient's foot, and learning from Blandina the course of treatment she had pursued, he said,—

“Your herbs are excellent healers, but they are ineffectual probers: there is some enemy at work too deep for their influence. If her Highness will submit to present pain to secure future ease, I have no doubt I shall be able to extract the thorn which I believe occasions the inflammation and mischief.”

Bertha expressed her ready acquiescence; and both her father and nurse answered for her patience and fortitude.

“I must first reduce the swelling,” continued the Leech, “and for this purpose will, with good Father Swithin's help, who is a rare herbalist, prepare a lotion, which will, I trust, give ease and sleep; but the Princess must not leave her couch till this is effected.”

The jointly-concocted sedative had the desired effect. The patient slept for some hours during the following night, and the Doctor had the pleasure, the next morning, of finding that the pain had abated and the swelling somewhat decreased.

It was nevertheless two days before the doctor deemed it safe to attempt to extract the thorn which had entered the heel, and had been forced deeper and deeper into it by the pressure of a slipper that Cinderella herself could not have worn with impunity under such circumstances.

The operation was a delicate, even a dangerous one; and though the Leech spoke cheerily to the anxious father, yet his directions to the nurse, even after the thorn had been extracted, betrayed his fears of yet lurking mischief.

“The Princess,” he said, “must be kept strictly quiet. No one must enter her chamber but yourself; and until the fever subsides, which now runs very high, nothing but water from St. Hilda's well must be suffered to touch her lips.”

The countenance of Blandina betrayed the question she feared to ask.

"I have no fear of the result, if my orders are faithfully observed. All, humanly speaking, will depend on outward quiet and inward calm. I depend on your watchfulness for the first. I have confidence in a higher power for the second."

"Fear not," said Blandina, resolutely repressing her tears. "If the most watchful care can prevent intrusion, if trust in God, and a conscience void of offence can give ease, my precious Princess will not lie long on that couch."

But she remained yet two days ere her skilful physician could probe deep enough to discover the cause of the continued pain and inflammation, and remove the remaining portion of the thorn which had caused it. Still, the injunction of rest and solitude was not rescinded, although Blandina was permitted to mix a little new milk with the water of the wondrous spring.

On the morning of the fourth day, the patient was so much recovered as to be allowed a short interview with her father, and a passing glimpse of Gertruda.

As the latter left the room, she met the Leech, and the cordiality of the greeting was observed by the patient, who thus noticed it.

"You know my friend, doctor?"

"From long ago; I attended her aunt in her last hours."

"Do you not think there is a striking resemblance between them?"

"Yes; but Gertruda is still more like her mother."

"Did you know her mother?"

"I did; and though it was not till sorrow had marred her countenance, I yet think of it as one of the loveliest I ever looked upon."

"Is it possible," said Bertha, after a short thoughtful pause, "that I see in my kind doctor the compassionate Leech who assisted the heroic Countess in her escape—who saved her life, and—"

"We will talk of this another time, when you are better able to bear the details of that mournful history, which that tell-tale hectic proves your Highness is not at present."

"I am not, indeed; alas, who is? There is another subject, however, that will not brook delay; and I deserve indulgence for having forborne too long to ask for my poor Inna."

The doctor was prepared for the question, and answered it guardedly, that "he hoped, under proper treatment, she would recover ere long." But there were further details to be deferred for the moment of convalescence, and he added,

"Rely, my Princess, on my utmost efforts to save her, and lay this, and every other burden, on One who has invited the weary and heavy-laden to go to Him."

Encouraged by the attention of the listener, and convinced of the efficacy of the prescription, the Christian physician drew from his well-stored memory many a holy text, applying them with simple earnestness. He had himself tested the value of the cordial he administered, and its effect on his patient was such as he had hoped.

Calmed, elevated, strengthened by the words of divine consolation so clearly explained, Bertha seemed to feel a new light had fallen on her path, hitherto so shrouded and uncertain; and though that light revealed many a difficult pass, though it swept over the howling wilderness and rugged mountain, she prayed for strength to follow its illumination. During her recent hours of watchfulness and pain, her thoughts had painfully rested on the mysterious threatenings which hung over her future life, the change which had too evidently taken place in her father's plans, and the secrecy he maintained respecting her espousals. That he, whom she honoured as a mirror of truth and honour, should forfeit both—should separate her from one he had commanded her to love—was too painful to be contemplated, and she resolutely banished, or struggled to banish, the suspicion as derogatory and disobedient.

But then came subjects scarcely less painful. The disappearance of Inna, the infatuation of Gertruda; all such, on a mind and frame weakened by pain and watchings, might have exerted a far more dangerous effect had not her physician found the means of ministering to both.

When his patient was able to bear a return of the subject of Gertruda's mother, the doctor himself introduced it for a pressing reason, which will be explained hereafter.

"My head was not very clear the other morning," she replied. "Did I dream, or did you in verity acknowledge you were the preserver of that virtuous but unfortunate lady?"

"Alas, little was the service I did her in prolonging a life of such woe and weariness."

"What! when it enabled her to minister to her husband in his death struggle?"

"True, my lady; I spake as a man—cold, hard man. I though not of woman's unselfish tenderness; and yet I witnessed, and can never forget it; but we will not speak more anent it now. I would rather discourse of the orphan daughter of these hapless parents, heir to their virtues, and, I fear, to their misfortunes—unless some kind hand interpose to snatch her from her evil destiny."

Here Blandina, who occupied her constant seat at her lady's pillow, rose.

"Do not go, my nurse; we have no secrets from you."

"I will but close the outer door. I thought I heard footsteps in the corridor."

It was those of the saucy page, who was sent back with a sharp reproof to his waiting-room; the door was closed, and the watchful nurse again at her post ere the broken thread of the discourse was resumed.

"Are you aware, Herr Baumgarten, that Gertruda's destiny is entirely of her own choosing?"

"I am; and yet more, I believe even the Abbess would put no constraint on her will, if expressed."

"What, then, is the imperative obligation which binds her, as she avers, to the cloister?"

"If," said the Leech, in a lowered voice, "I rightly divine the chain, my belief is that its links are fragile, and will break ere long. If we could delay the sacrifice but for one year, it is my full conviction that this sweet bird would be as happy to flee away as many of her engaged companions: but this,"

he continued cheerfully—for he feared the subject was too exciting to his yet frail patient—“I have a little scheme for effecting. I have some influence with the Abbess: if it please you, I will tell you how acquired.”

Nothing could be more acceptable, and the Leech went on:—

“After incurring the displeasure of, we will hope, the then *insane* Queen of Hungary, by refusing to execute her cruel orders, and aiding in the escape of—” He paused.

“I know but too well to whom you allude,” said Bertha mournfully; “but go on, I pray.”

“I deemed it necessary again to leave the neighbourhood. I wished also to watch over the wanderings of the heroic wife, and, though unseen by her, to provide her food and shelter on her pious pilgrimage. It was God’s gracious will that I should accomplish this, and finally rescue her from the fangs of blood-thirsty persecutors. My own safety was of little worth. I was a lone man, little known or cared for. But I could yet lessen the sufferings of my fellow-creatures. I felt my healing art was the one talent left me to employ; and I ranged amongst the mountains, content with such food and shelter as were gratefully given me for the exercise of it. To Him, who has clothed the wildest wastes with plants of wondrous virtue, be the praise! for enabling me to extract remedies from those that grew around me, for the relief of my humble benefactors. In my wanderings I heard of the strange malady that had attacked the Queen of Hungary. I was acquainted with a certain little plant whose blossoms I had found of great efficacy in complaints of the nerves, and more especially epilepsy—disorders little studied, and their cure attempted only by superstitious rites and incantations.

“From the description given me of the Queen’s extraordinary case, I conceived the notion that the plant in question might prove a palliative, if not a cure. It was then, I knew, in blossom; but its habitat was the fertile meadow-land of the valley, and how could I leave my hiding-place in the mountain to cull it? For a little time I hesitated, but after and better thoughts overcame all uncharitable feelings and

unfaithful fears. I sought the holy Celestine—refuge of all in need—and through him conveyed the remedy to Agnes; and, though no human skill can remove the dire disease, she finds great virtue in it as a restorative."

"It was, then, gratitude for this remedy that induced my aunt to place you near her person?"

"Not so; I owed my favour to another cause, ere yet she knew the source from whence she derived it. Guided in all her actions by a blind impetuous zeal and an indomitable will, when revenge for the murder of her sire had been slaked and satiated in blood, remorse tore her heart with equal violence. Her first craying was to propitiate by fasts, lacerations, and vigils the anger of an offended God, till the faithful admonitions of the Hermit of St. Hilda roused her to the duty of reparation; and, with the hope of exorcising the ghosts of the murdered which haunted both her waking and sleeping hours, she sought out the wretched survivors of her cruelty to make the only restitution now left her. Amongst the banished, she caused me to be brought before her, and, after begging my forgiveness for her attempt to engage me in the guilt of murder, she expressed her obligations to me for having spared her an additional crime, and entreated me, with an earnestness I scarcely thought her cold nature capable of, to become the resident leech of her Abbey."

"I fear you must ere now have repented of your consent thereof."

"Man's vocation is that of trial everywhere; but to minister to the ills of the mind is far more distressing than those of the body. My poor patients on the mountain, amid all their outward sufferings, were cheerful and resigned; but of these poor recluses, besides the tortures of their Abbess, I could tell you tales of hopeless grief that would not be prudent in your physician."

Bertha sighed deeply. "Has my aunt shown no abatement in her favour towards you and the hermit Celestine?" she asked.

"None; though I have reason to believe there are those

in both houses who would gladly remove us, and that without much scruple about the means."

"You surely cannot mean—"

"No, noble lady, I do *not* mean her whom you hesitate to name. I allude to the bloody wolf that he who calls himself the shepherd of Christ's flock has let loose in the enclosure of Koenigsfelden."

"The new Prior?"

"The same; who has already sown the seeds of discord in both communities, and who would remove both her physicians from the Abbess."

Bertha shuddered. "Nay, he will not; he dare not."

"The lion cannot get beyond the length of his chain, and we know that is held in merciful hands. His will be done!"

At his next visit the Leech found his patient so much recovered, that he thought it right to advise her leaving her apartment, and joining the family party. So accurate a reader of the human mind had discovered that there lay a weight on that of his interesting charge, which retirement would add to rather than diminish; therefore, trusting to her prudence, he even sanctioned her partaking of any amusement that was going forward.

But this last interview was not to be thrown away, either by the doctor or his patient; and each, though unknown to the other, had determined to improve it by introducing a subject interesting alike to both—the near-approaching profession of Gertruda.

"I have thought much, my kind doctor," said Bertha, "on what you said of Gertruda's tie to the convent. Both my nurse and I have long ago discovered her pity and tenderness for Henga, which we believed sprang from their early intimacy in childhood. Do you really think the poor lad's life will be a short one?"

"You have arrived at a conclusion which I will not gainsay. I believe Henga to be the chain which rivets his—the Fraulein to the convent. I believe, too, the links are weak, and I would do all I could—alas, how little!—to defer the

irrevocable vow. In the performance of this duty, which she has bound on herself, sacrifice would not be felt, but without it Koenigsfelden would be—”

“I know it,” interrupted Bertha; and again reverting to Henga, she added thoughtfully, “Their early association hardly accounts for this extraordinary devotion. Henga’s affection in his way is equally apparent. Thou knowest,” she continued, turning to Blandina, “how often we remarked the smile that absolutely *beautified* the poor lad’s face at her approach, whilst no overture of mine could win even a look. It would seem that he bore an ill-will to our race; for even my father, who is loved of all, could not get him to touch the hand he graciously held out to him; whilst my aunt courts his favour in vain.”

“We are fearfully and wonderfully made, lady. Man is a piece of the finest mechanism, which a touch will disorder—an indefinable pressure on a delicate nerve will sometimes mar the harmony of the whole machine, and set it ajar. Henga is a notable instance of this; the fabric was of rare material, as the fragments show. The boy’s taste and ingenuity are surprising; and equally wonderful is his power over animate nature. He tames the wildest goats of the mountain. He has but to whistle, and the birds float around and perch upon him; and Father Swithin—all but enchanter as he himself is in horticultural *legerdemain*—declares that Henga is the most clever conjurer of the two.”

“Do you not opine, doctor, that Henga, in his power over birds and beasts resembles St. Francis, and has perhaps insensibly been led to the imitation of the founder of the Minorites from being placed in a monastery of his order?”

“I do not doubt it. And yet more, I believe that the good father’s histories of the saints’ sermons to the swallows, and other colloquies, have had a strong and beneficial effect on the lad’s mind; for, nervously averse from intercourse with his fellows, the affection he bears to his flowers, and the friendships he contracts with birds, bees, and butterflies, have given that ideal beauty to nature which gilds his whole being, and nourishes

the devotional turn of his innocent mind. Yes, my Princess's observation has let in the right light: doubtless St. Francis's history has influenced him, illuminated as it daily is by the good Swithin's comments."

"And do you not think also," added Bertha, pursuing the idea, "the same influence has extended to his outward guise?"

"No question," answered the Leech, smiling: "it was the picture of the hirsute saint, jointly with his morbid shrinking from observation, which made Henga adopt that hairy screen with which he persists in covering his face."

"And that's a great pity, for it is a very comely one when he thinks he is unobserved. Altogether he is a riddle."

"Yet there is still harmony in that unstrung lute. The boy is full of the gentlest affections; alas, that a cruel hand should have crushed his infant promise!"

"A rough *hand*, sir Leech? I thought it was surmised that the child suffered from his mother's courageous compassion to the dying Emperor."

"It is thus generally said, and believed. One day, perchance, I may be permitted to explain the mystery that hangs over this boy, who exhibits the most wonderful phase of man's moral and intellectual being that has ever come under my observation. Thus much I fear I must prognosticate. From a minute watching of the expansion of the mind, and a decay of the flesh, that Henga will not be long amongst us, and that he will soon join that angelic choir to whom he has a closer affinity than any other I know of mortal mould, unless we except his artless associate, Father Swithin."

Bertha's eyes filled with tears as she said, "If your prophecy of Henga's fate be fulfilled, I mistrust me, it will include that of the father also, who will not long survive him."

"I had almost said, so be it! Truly it is a sweet compact between youth and age. It is an attribute of Divinity, which finds a faint reflection in noble minds, to love those who have most needed and experienced our love. Thus do we see the sturdy child take the hand of his tottering grandame in pre-

ference to that of his mother, as if to give support whilst seeming to demand it."

The recollection of her father's declining health and wounded spirit crossed the mind of Bertha, and she listened with deepening interest as the doctor dilated on his favourite theme.

"Now the absence of mental equilibrium, joined to Henga's exceeding skill and infantile dependence, make, with the leading traits of decision, judgment, and order in Swithin's character, the most perfect compact that ever cemented mind to mind. It is just as the skilful gardener finds his strength failing that he discovers one exactly able and willing to assist him; one who betrays no weariness in his presence or reluctance at his exactions; one whose interests, detached from self, are all centred in his benefactor, and who loves him with an affection as ardent as disinterested. No, Swithin would not long survive this son of his adoption."

"You believe, then, that a link so binding can exist between persons in such different stages of life?"

"I will illustrate my position. Look at the ivy round yonder aged tree, that seems almost coeval with your ancient race; that ivy, which twines itself over the trunk and clothes its sere branches, not only gives beauty and verdure to the tree, but yields it shelter and support. Separate it, gently as you can, but in pulling it away from the prop on which it so lovingly clings you destroy the supporting tree. The rains will pour through its hollow trunk; the soil around it, no longer held together by the many-fibred roots, become saturated and loosened; the sun will burn, the frosts will chill, the storms will rend it. Desolate and alone, it will fling about its bare branches for awhile, and then uprooted, fall prostrate on its mother earth."

"And the ivy?" said Bertha, with scarcely suppressed emotion, her mind again engrossed by the fate of a yet nobler tree.

"The ivy must share the fate of its support. It is thus, I believe, that our poor clinging Henga would die if deprived

of his. I believe the loss either of Father Swithin or Gertruda would prove fatal to his keenly sensitive mind and weak constitution. I remember, and maybe your highness may not have forgotten, the malignant fever which broke out in the convent a few years since, and attacked the Fraulein?"

"But too well. No power but main force could uproot the poor boy, night or day, from the spot from which he could discern the light in the infirmary window where she then lay."

"Thus, I feel assured that nothing but death can divide them; and my medical knowledge leads me to the belief that the ruthless dissolver of human ties will ere long destroy this."

"Oh, then," exclaimed Bertha, suddenly catching the Leech's meaning, "if we could but delay this hated profession, Gertruda might be induced to renounce it."

"It is exactly what I would urge you to lose no time or effort to accomplish; unless we succeed, the life of the Fraulein will be the sacrifice; she will not bear the chill of a conventional life after expanding in liberty and sunshine."

Further conversation, beyond a mutual promise to do all in their power to effect the emancipation of their beloved captive, was now suspended between the doctor and his patient by the entrance of Blandina to receive his further orders.

"I have none to give," he said, "but gentle exercise in the open air, and cheerful converse within doors. The Princess must leave her apartment and join the social circle; neither do I forbid her partaking in any festivities to which they may be pledged."

If Bertha's pale cheeks and feeble steps called forth the sympathy of the friends who crowded round to welcome her return, she felt hers engaged in the changes which a little more than a week's separation had wrought on them. The Archduke Frederick was sadder and more silent. The Duchess's usually calm presence was agitated by a nervous irritability, and her sallow cheek streaked with hectic flushes. The calm Albert was restless, the restless Leopold calm.

But the greatest change had passed over the twin sisters ; both were graver and more womanly, but in a different guise. Alice's complexion glowed with a brighter hue, her eyes were softer and more expressive, often cast down, and sometimes bedewed with tears ; but her smile, when roused from her occasional fits of absence, was radiant with happiness. Poor little Aletta, on the contrary, was pale and listless ; her playfulness had vanished, and was succeeded by a fretful irritation foreign to her native good-humoured cheerfulness. She took no trouble to exert herself or to conceal her dissatisfaction, the cause of which no one could divine, not even her sister-self ; unless it were that unusual exertion and late hours had impaired her health.

But such could not account for the unusual spirits of the retiring Gertruda, which the pious Duchess failed not to attribute to the joy inspired by her approaching profession. Did Bertha believe this ? Did that changeful cheek, now white as monumental marble, now outblushing the rose—did that absent smile, that fitful vivacity, deceive her earnest inquiry ? She knew Gertruda better, and more than ever determined to exert every power to set her free.

The two younger knights were with the assembled family, and it was well that, through Blandina's intimacy with the housedame, she had been already apprised of the departure of their companion ; since his lengthened absence became a subject of conversation and regret ; the Archduke remarking, that he trusted he would yet return to form one of several projected hunting parties, and more especially would be present at a fête to be given at Castle Braunegge, on the christening of the baron's infant heir.

It now becomes the chronicler's duty to follow the fortunes of the errant Knight.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RECALL.

When false Pilatus doffs his cap,
Traveller, beware of some mishap!—OLD SAW.

THE incognito Knight, whom our sagacious readers have doubtless recognized under the disguises of pilgrim, and hunter (if they have not made further guesses at his identity), left the ball-room immediately after the Princess and her ghostly supporter. As he passed through the antechamber, that was crowded with the retainers of the Castle and those of the numerous guests, he was accosted by a young man in whom he immediately recognized the son of Guillaume Tell.

How the youth discovered the “pilgrim grey” under his present knightly trappings and court braveries it boots us not to tell; certain it is, he failed not to deliver to the right person a strip of parchment endorsed by a well-known arrow, and containing this parabolical information:—

“We have tracked the fox to his hole; follow the bearer, and help to unearth him.”

“I will meet thee at the postern-gate at dawn, boy. Refresh thyself at the buttery, and sleep till then.”

These concise directions given, the speaker sought his chamber, doffed his court dress, and put on the pilgrim weeds in which he was first introduced to the reader. He then sat down some time in silence, listening for the footsteps of De Lauffenburg, whose apartment joined his own.

He came at last, but accompanied by De Courcy, with whom he remained some time in seemingly earnest conversation.

At length the “good night” was distinguished, then creeping footsteps along the corridor; a distant door softly opened and shut, and all was still.

The revels closed, and the revellers retired into the privacy of their own chambers ; the Pilgrim—for such we must at *present* designate our modern Proteus—entered that of De Lauffenburg. Although changes, both in appearance and purpose, were much more commonplace affairs in those knight-errantry days than our own, the noble minstrel did not look on the vision before him without surprise, although he expressed none.

“Read this paper,” said the intruder, “and I prithee tell me how thou expoundest the riddle.”

“Doubtless by Tell’s encountering the demon of the bridge, and gaining, or expecting some important revelation therefrom.”

“Just so. You know how you all combated my foolish pleasure of allowing the miscreant to escape unscathed, an obstinacy I have since repented of. The truth is, I have got an inkling of his employer, which makes his evidence of great account; therefore I mean to follow honest Tell’s advice, and depart with his son at break of day.”

“When you will find me ready to accompany you.”

“No, my brave boy, I will not take you from these sunny regions into the turmoil of that accursed stream !”

“Much less should your precious life be hazarded near it; and alone.”

“Tush, boy ! with Tell and his son I would encounter the foul fiend himself, even on his haunted bridge !”

“Nay, I cannot be repulsed ! On my knees I would implore you to accept my poor services ; perhaps in so doing, you will release me from spells more dangerous than any that hang over that stormy desert.”

The Pilgrim looked with concern on the kneeling pleader, as for the first time he noticed his altered mien, his hollow eye, and quickly changing colour.

“De Lauffenburg, my son,” he said, as he gently raised him, “hast thou hovered round one of the lights, which might well dazzle even steadier vision, until your daring wings were scorched ? Yet, cheer up ! If, as men suspect, the Princess

Aletta smile not on thee, there are many eyes as bright that look on thee with kindling beam."

"Aletta!" answered the bard, with a bard's disdain; "no, pretty and graceful as she be, she is not, nor ever could be, the lady of *my* *devoir*."

"May our Lady forbid, rash boy, that thou should'st fix thy affections on thy cousin, the affianced bride of thy—"

"My aspirings, alas, are to a yet higher rivalry, the Bride of Heaven."

It was well for the guardianship of his secret that the lamp the Pilgrim held was too dim to betray the workings of his countenance, and that the bard's emotion prevented his noticing that of his friend; thereby affording him time to check the natural impetuosity of his nature, and call up its equally native generosity.

"Shall I," he thought, "the betrothed of another, become the rival of this ingenuous boy? Shall I interfere with his happiness, and that of one, alas, yet dearer? No; rather let me strain every nerve to remove all obstacles that would separate them."

When did ever a virtuous resolve fail of its reward. There was but one drawback to the satisfaction of this generous resolution—"Did Gertruda return the love of De Lauffenburg?" But the doubt, as the suggestive deduction of a more dangerous influence, was resolutely repelled.

"De Lauffenburg," he said, after this momentary struggle, "you already know the pressing calls to Bohemia (to which I have too long turned a deaf ear) can be no longer unheeded. Be my search for the murderous Friar successful or no, I shall not at present return hither; but if there is aught I can do, be it even an application to the chair of St. Peter, to save this poor maiden and to make ye both happy, that will I do. Cheer up, my brave boy! the irrevocable oath is not yet taken, and if all else fail, we will have recourse to our chivalry."

"Alas! if they were all, what are convent bars or hosts of nuns and cowled friars to oppose the course of true love? The only obstacle I fear is her own determination. The ladies Alice

and Aletta have declared to me that Gertruda's choice is the veil, and her own lips have confirmed her determined resolution to assume it."

The smile of incredulity which this information drew forth quickly vanished as the Pilgrim rose to depart, and said with a voice which trembled in spite of his utmost efforts to steady it,—

"If that be all the impediment to thy happiness, I have reason to believe it may be overcome. But I must away, for see, the dawn begins to streak the clouds."

De Lauffenburg bent one knee to the ground, pressed to his lips the hand held out to grasp his own, and the friends parted.

The travellers left the castle as the first rays of morning gleamed above the mountain-tops, whilst the frozen dew crisped the herb beneath their feet; and though neither of them had enjoyed a night's repose, and one had not closed an eye, they drew an invigoration that chased away weariness and sleepiness, from the mountain air. The practised hunter led the way through lone valleys and pine forests, and across sharp cuts on the mountain side. They stopped occasionally at the goat-herd's hut or cowherd's châlet, where the lingering inhabitants had not yet descended into their winter quarters, to procure the necessary refreshment—a draught of milk, rye bread and goat's cheese. Once they passed the night with no covering but their cloaks, and no roof but the deep blue vault of the starry heaven.

Though eager for the elucidation of Tell's summons, and involved in a future of difficulty—nay, even whilst scorning his own weakness—the Pilgrim at such times could not refrain from seductive musings on the past, or dangerous dreams of what he knew his future could not realize.

The shaded pine forest through which he, almost unconsciously, followed the footsteps of his guide; the mossy banks on which he reposed, whilst Guillaume left him in search of refreshment or shelter; the tumble of the torrent, the moan of the wind amid the branches of the giant pines, which seemed

to breathe sounds from a distant world,—all nursed his melancholy, and he felt almost sorry when his guide announced that early on the morrow they would reach Lucerne, and find his father with a boat in readiness to convey them to the head of the lake.

Ashamed of his weakness, he vigorously roused himself for action. “Gertruda,” he mentally said, “I must tear thine image from mine heart and restore its rightful possessor; and is she not as worthy of its affections, even as thou art? Yet will she regard *me* with the same modest favour?” And then the thought that his too evident admiration might have awakened feelings inimical to the peace of that innocent heart, caused an additional pang, though not altogether without its sweetness.

But the journey is ended, the quaint city of the peerless lake is in view; and finally gathering up his wide wandering thoughts, the many pressing considerations of necessity, self-preservation, ambition, and revenge asserted their right, and he entered Lucerne with a determination to pursue with courage and diligence the object which had brought him thither.

They found the elder Tell impatiently pacing the Hofbrücke.

“All thanks to St. Francis, sir Pilgrim,” said he, reverently unbonneting, “you are at length arrived! I have been ever since daybreak waiting for you, and watching that black traitor,” pointing to Mont Pilatus, who rears his shaggy head over the lake. “See, how the arch-fiend doffs his cap to the evil demons of the storm which his black art is conjuring up.”

“Storm? I see nothing but the clear mountain summit reflected in the glassy lake. It is *you* that are the sorcerer; tell me, therefore, what thou wouldest of me, and wherefore hast thou summoned me?”

“To hear a confession which most nearly concerns you, and can be breathed in no other ear. But we are all too late, I fear.”

“Let us, then, lose no more time, and brave both Pilatus and his—” The Bowman crossed himself whilst he hastily interrupted the irreverent challenge. “Away, away, then! we *may* reach Weggis before the storm breaks, and pursue our

way from thence on foot." And as Tell spoke he led the way to the quay, where they found his boat ready manned by Guillaume the younger, and another active rower. "Up with the latyne whilst the wind holds fair, my lads ; it is brisk, and will blow us speedily forward ; but we must be on the alert, for I hear the grumblings of the threatening tempest."

Tell guided the helm, the two young men sat at their oars ; but the prudent pilot forbade their plying them, too surely aware that all their strength would be needed for the coming struggle. Not an unnecessary word was spoken. The beautiful craft shot onward, like one of their own darts through the clear but tossing waves. Suddenly her sails flapped, and a shiver ran through her timbers, as if she had been a thing of life, and felt her coming trial. The sail was now secured, and the oars grasped almost before the order had passed the pilot's lips.

"Ay, these are the traitor's tears," observed Guillaume's fellow-rower, as large drops of rain fell, each with a distinct splash, into the lake, "and yonder his flaming sword."

"Silence, my lads ! Pull towards the Bay of Fluellen ; we may find a shelter before the storm overtakes us in the little harbour of Treib, and seek a way on foot over the mountains to Altdorff. Thanks, noble Pilgrim ! thine arm does good service."

But the full-stretched sinews of the whole brave band were exerted in vain to outstrip the tempest, which came on with fearful rapidity. The day had been warm, but the icy wind from the mountains came loaded with snow and hail. The thunder rolled from rock to rock, and broke over their heads. The lightning blazed like a wall of flame around the craggy foot of Pilatus ; and though the more enlightened Pilgrim did not give his full belief to the wild legend of the too-late repentant judge, he could scarcely wonder at the credulity which converted the howlings of the storm into the shrieks of the doomed.

"And this, then," he thought, "is the fitting end of my restless life. So be it ! I am weary of the struggle. Yet, oh

Gertruda, who will snatch thee from the living grave? Who now will execute those towering schemes of ambition which have cost me such years of toil and painful sacrifice to bring close to completion? But away with these vain visions. What heeds the perishing of love or ambition? *Certainty* alone is what he has to deal with. My God, if thou wilt deliver me from this peril, I vow no longer to sport with Thy forbearance; I vow,"—a bitter smile curled his lips—"I vow?" he repeated in humbler accents, "I, a miserable sinner, not half so precious in Thy sight as these honest peasants. For their sake, then—but oh, above all, for His who died for all, draw us out of these deep waters—"

The voice of Tell interrupted the prayer, and almost staggered all hope in its efficacy.

"It is but lost labour; we cannot weather the point, and to attempt to near the shore is the deed only of desperation. Keep in the middle of the lake, my brave lads, and we will do all we can to stay the boat from sinking." There were a few minutes of strenuous effort, when he added, "The helm is useless. Here, give me thine oar, boy. There is One above who alone can pilot us through dangers such as these. Pray, Pilgrim, pray!"

And he did pray, with all the energy of his ardent nature—and his supplications, with those of his pious companions, were heard. The Lord drew them from the depths out of which they cried; and just when faith failed, and even hope grew dim, the storm subsided (as is not unusual in those regions) almost as rapidly as it had commenced. The clouds rolled back, and from beneath them the light of the emerging moon enabled the skilful boatmen to reach the haven they sought. They landed on the spot, so celebrated in the most wonderful epoch—in the most wonderful of histories,—where a few mountaineers, raising their toil-worn hands beneath the star-sown firmament, swore to free their country from the tyrant's thrall, or perish with her. The same stars in their spiritual brightness looked down on our little party, as, headed by one of the principal actors in that wonderful drama, drew up

their boat on the lake shore, and sought a night's refuge in the Liberators' cave near by.

"There is nothing to appease the cravings of hunger herein," said Tell, as they entered it, "and our provisions are all water-logged; but we have yet an undrained flask of Kirchenwasser, which, mixed with the crystal water of this miraculous well, that gushed forth beneath the footsteps of our Liberators, may prove no unwelcome restorative. Will you pledge me, sir Pilgrim?"

This invitation was thankfully accepted in turn by each of the party; after which the two young men were despatched by Tell in search of some more solid refreshment at a village about a mile up the mountain, there to engage the help of the inhabitants in catering for their supper and night's accommodation in their rock-roofed dormitory. Tell now struck a light, and his companion helped him in collecting wood for a fire, whose cheerful blaze illuminated the deepest recess of the cavern. Accustomed to these upholstery exigencies, Tell brought in the root of a tree, which he fashioned with two or three strokes of his hatchet into a comfortable seat, and offered it to his companion.

"Why, verily, thou hast cut me out a throne," said the latter, as he seated himself on this impromptu arm-chair.

"And who more worthy to fill one?"

"If thus thou deemest, get thyself another seat and relate to me why thou hast so unceremoniously summoned me. If thou canst not show just cause whereof, I shall arraign thee of *præmunire* at the least."

"I did so at the earnest bidding of the Prior of St. Gothard, and as well that I knew it was an errand you yourself would be pleased to further."

"Prithee explain."

"The Prior's plea was the pressing desire of a dying man to confide in your ear a secret that he would confess to no one else."

"And so the good Prior, his own ears itching to hear this secret, drags me through flood and tempest as the only

medium of getting at it; besides, by the toe of his Holiness! what can a poor dying man want of *me*? Are there not holy confessors enough at the Hospice? but this comes of masquerading. The fellow little thinks what a wolf in sheep's clothing he has fixed on to tell his secret to."

The speaker was fast working himself up into veritable indignation, when the patient listener, secure in his power of allaying it, said in a calm low voice,—

"What, if your dying penitent were the assassin of the bridge?"

The stout man shuddered.

"Even thus, I would rather he were shrived by one who held him less in aversion; bear him my forgiveness, and let him bury his secret in the grave with him."

"The name of his employer?"

"Ah, that indeed might be worth an effort; but why deemest thou that it be really he?"

"From little less than certainty. He was found, a few days after he had left the Hospice as your guide, buried in the snow, by the Maroniers and their brave dogs, and conveyed to the Hospice, where he was with difficulty restored to life. Although the Prior and his officials did all they could to keep the secret, I have found out to a certainty that the rescued man is no other than the deaf and dumb monk of Koenigsfelden; and have learnt further from my old friend the Cellarer, that his state is most desperate, mortification having already commenced in the extremities."

"From what you say, friend, I conclude that the Prior, when despatching you to seek me, did not tell you for whom."

"Certainly not; but I put two and two together, and I think you must allow that my arithmetic is correct."

"I do, and come what will, I am sure shall never repent of trusting myself to your guidance."

The sound of mingling voices and approaching footsteps broke up the *tête-à-tête*. The two young men returned accom-

panied by several others laden with provisions for the way-worn and wave-worn travellers, which were soon spread out before them ; and the hospitable Swiss hosts, finding the offer of beds in their own dwellings declined, on the score of distance and fatigue, brought trusses of heather and some coarse coverings, from which they arranged such beds as had often supplied their own necessities : then wished the travellers good repose, and took their leave. Tell saw the ready hand untying the purse-strings, and arrested it.

“ On your peril, sir Pilgrim, offer no affront to these honest villagers ! Woe betide the hour, if it ever arrive, when the stranger’s gold shall conquer, where the tyrant’s sword and chains have failed.”

We need not say how the supper was relished. From the slight elevation of his sylvan throne, the royal guest looked down on the fine athletic forms of his companions, grouped round the rock on which their simple yet luxurious repast was spread, glowing with health and intelligence, and thought how often this storied cave with its associations would be remembered in his after-life.

The supper ended, the younger pair retired to rest. The elder remained yet a little while to consult on the morrow’s proceedings, and the possible frustration of its object by the death of the mysterious summoner.

“ At all events,” said the Pilgrim, “ our visit to the Prior is imperative. I shall proceed at once from thence to the south ; and it will not be the least of my obligations to you, my noble Tell, that you have recalled me from dangerous sloth to active duty.”

The friends now bade each other good night, and seeking their fragrant couch slept soundly and dreamlessly till the dawn, when the whole party were again astir.

After a hearty breakfast on the fragments of the evening’s meal, they were soon seated in their boat, which, like themselves, had suffered but little damage from the rough encounters of the preceding day. The latyne sail was set, and filled by a gentle breeze ; the joyous band, under the insen-

sible influence of the beautiful scenery around—of fair skies and calm waters, of the glorious sun and the free air—were overflowing with a gentle hilarity, which vented itself in jest and song.

The Pilgrim listened with full content, and looked around with unfeigned admiration.

“It must be confessed,” he said, “that this your lake is the Queen of inland waters—beautiful from Nature’s workmanship, beautiful in the deeds of its brave people; but at the same time it cannot be gainsaid that it is both fickle and dangerous. Who would have suspected, when we sailed over it yestreen, when not a ripple curled its surface, that it would have treated us so deceitfully?”

“It is but too true,” replied Tell. “Even our boatmen confess they often find the wind to change behind every point.”

“How know we, then, that when we have weathered yonder jutting cliff, and left these close embracing banks, we shall not have to battle with similar storms to those we encountered last night?”

“By yonder token,” said the younger Tell, pointing to Mont Pilatus, whose top was hooded in dense clouds and floating mist.

“Nay, to my eye the token is a frowning one.”

“You know not, then, the old distich,” said Tell, smiling, “and that Mont Pilatus, like him from whom it takes its name, is to be read by contrariety. It runs thus—

“ Wenn Pilatus trägst sein hut,
Dann wird das wetter gut.”*

“Your mountain reads a lesson I have too often proved—that some men’s smiles are more dangerous than their frowns.”

The mountain and its expositors were true to their auguries.

* “When Pilatus wears his hat, the weather will be good.”

After a sail, in which no clouds were to be discerned but those around the Giant's head, they reached Fluellen about noon. Here the pleasant party divided, the young men to return to their home, and the Pilgrim and his guide to pursue their way on foot to the Hospice of St. Gothard.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NEMESIS.

As ye sow, so likewise shall ye reap.

THE travellers pursued their way for some time in silence, which Tell at length broke with the abrupt question,—

“Am I presumptuous in asking if you do not recollect any previous intercourse with this dumb friar, Sir Pilgrim?”

The questioned started. “Thou hast divined my thoughts, Tell; they were busy in trying to account for an impression, which has haunted me from the first moment of meeting him at the Hospice, that I had seen those eyes before—But, no; I can find nothing wherewith to link them either with the past or present.”

“It is strange he should bear you such deadly hatred, as twice to attempt your life!”

“Unless—for there are those who make a merchandise of blood—he was hired to take my life. It would not be the first aim that has been made at it, for I have no lack of enemies—political, maybe, rather than personal.”

“May Heaven turn their devices, as now, to their own confusion! But this friar, I know full well, was no *hired* assassin: it was the thirst of blood, not of gold, which directed his blade. I have seen your trader in human life, but never with such dilated nostrils and glaring eyeballs.”

“Enough, enough, good Tell, I grow a coward when I think of them.”

Again they climbed the mountain in silence. The Pilgrim’s countenance was clouded, for his musings were tinged with deep self-reproach for time wasted, opportunities unemployed, life perilled, and character compromised; and he mentally vowed never again to indulge his love of wild adventure, but

steadily to pursue a course of life suited to his character and position. There were other strong resolves and heroic sacrifices included in these musings. In his dreamy future, he beheld Gertruda the bride of De Lauffenburg, and one as fair, if not as loved, at his side.

As they crossed the too-well-remembered bridge, Tell pointed to a stain as of blood on the spot where the friar fell, and his companion replied,—

“But for thy interposition, my friend, the earth would have drunk deeper of mine.”

The travellers next entered the dreary region already described, and had advanced about half-way when a mournful strain was heard to mingle with the torrent’s voice. Tell stood still for a few moments, then pointed to an eminence which rose at a short distance, and exclaimed,—

“It is, then, as I feared. See you not the funeral procession which has just gained the crown of yonder hill? It is doubtless that of the friar, whose body they are bearing to the monastery below.”

This little procession was headed by one of the lay brothers, carrying a tall cross before the simple bier, borne on the shoulders of six stout mountaineers. On either side walked a monk of St. Gothard, and the train was closed by a relay of six more bearers, all joining in the monotone of the dirge.

The leading monk bade the bearers lay down the bier as they reached the spot where our travellers, with uncovered heads, awaited its approach.

He accosted the Pilgrim with marked respect, and delivered to him a pressing invitation from the Prior to visit the Hospice; expressing at the same time his Superior’s regret at being prevented by indisposition from meeting him in the valley, there to deliver to him some papers of importance.

“Here, then,” said the Pilgrim (after courteously accepting the Prior’s invitation), laying his hand on the bier, “are the remains of the mute friar?”

“They are,” replied the monk, solemnly removing the covering from the face of death, and adding, “Let us hope his

ears are now open to the melodies of heaven, and his tongue newly strung to the praise of the blessed Mary and the saints."

The Pilgrim turned involuntarily away; then, as if determined to conquer his repugnance, fixed his eyes on the calm countenance, gazing as if by fascination.

"He sleeps well."

"He sleeps within the fold of the Church, of whom he was a dutious son."

"I am glad I have seen him, now death has closed those restless eyes," said the Pilgrim, withdrawing his, as the monk replaced the face-cloth, and added, "We must not delay your progress; the day wanes, and we have each a long journey before us."

He signed to the bearers to resume their burden. The funeral anthem again mingled with the torrent's roar; and our travellers remained to watch the receding procession until its waters fell unaccompanied but by the murmuring of the evening gale; and they were once more alone on the mountain-side. The day had closed in ere they reached the Hospice, where the Pilgrim was welcomed by the same porter as had before admitted him, but this time with a more ceremonious respect.

"His reverence," he said, "had been hastened by his enemy, the podagra, early to bed; but he had ordered that all in his poor ability should be done to make his guest welcome." And few are the travellers, even in our more fastidious age, but would have found themselves content therewith, after so many days of hardships and peril as our wanderer had encountered.

A blazing fire was the first ingredient of comfort; then were dry under-garments from the Prior's own wardrobe provided; and when the outer man was thus refreshed, the inner was not forgotten, and a supper such as we have already described, with its accompanying cordials, was served and relished.

Tell, who came afterwards into the room to see into the well being and doing of his charge, was invited to pledge him in a cup of the latter, to the health of the good Prior and the discomfiture of the podagra.

The Cellarer, his good friend and confidant, who had accompanied Tell, showed no reluctance to the spiced cup or the toast, and contributed his full share to the pleasant sociability of the next hour, banishing all thought of weariness or sleep.

As at length Tell rose to take leave, he blended with his good night a hope that his fellow-traveller would sleep more soundly than on the former night he had passed in the Hospice, adding, “that if the ghost of the dumb friar disturbed him, he had but to knock on the wall, and he would arise to his assistance; since the Prior had ordered a bed to be prepared for him in the adjoining chamber, that he might be at hand to attend to the wants of the guest the good superior appeared so desirous to honour.”

The poor friar, it is to be hoped, slept quietly in the cloisters below; at any rate, he did not disturb the weary Pilgrim even in his dreams, for his fatigue and exhaustion even overpowered the conflicting emotions of the past. He slept long and soundly, and arose with eye as bright, with head as clear, and step as firm, as if nothing unusual had taxed their powers; and nothing now remained of his mental struggle but the stern resolution that sealed it.

A substantial breakfast was a prelude to the business of the day: and soon after, that more serious business was heralded by a courteous invitation from the Prior to his guest to an audience in his private parlour, and a ceremonious apology for not showing the way thither in person.

The Pilgrim was ushered into the sanctum with every mark of respect by two or three of the leading officials, who bowed and retired. The sick man was in “durance vile” of gouty bandages, but pleasant and gracious as of old, although there was a little more ceremony in his welcome, and yet more of apology deprecatory of the lodging and dietary of his Hospice—as he attempted to rise from what could scarcely be called an *easy* chair; high and straight-backed, with broad arms and wooden seat, the very antipodes to all modern ideas either of comfort or repose. The guest truthfully and cordially replied that there was nothing lacking, either in kind or degree,

in the hospitality he had been shown, and tendered his grateful thanks, adding with characteristic abruptness that he had not yet discovered the meaning of his summons.

"Neither can I explain it," said the Prior; "unless you will give me a cue to the mystery. However, you shall hear all I know, which I trust will justify my proceedings in the case; first craving your indulgence for an old man's prolixity and his phthisic.

The listener bowed.

"You do not, I am sure, forget," continued the Prior, "your last visit to these heights, and your mute guide down its sides?"

"Nor ever shall," was the emphatic reply.

"It was just three days after (I mind the day, seeing it was the festival of our patron St. Gothard, of unctuous memory) when our Maroniers brought in the corpse of a man found by our noble dogs beneath the snow, which had been falling for many days, and caused our men and dogs to be on the alert."

"Pardon me, reverend father, did you say a *corpse*? It could not, then, have been that of the dumb Franciscan who lived till yesterday?"

"And yet he it was, my son, and a *bond fide* corse into the bargain," repeated the Prior, with the half-facetious, half-consequential air of a propounder of riddles difficult of solution. "And, moreover, the said corse would have been forthwith conveyed to the dead-house, had not our brothers reminded me of the many miracles wrought by our patron Saint (*ora pro nobis*) on his festival day; recording how this one had been raised from a fever, another from the falling sickness; then again, and no less wonderful, how hidden treasure had been brought to light, and lost articles recovered. But I have not breath," and here the good Prior was seized with a fit of coughing, "to tell you half the notable miracles wrought by the Saint on these his anniversay festivals. *Here*, however, was one to crown the blessed catalogue. Our brothers, nevertheless, continued to rub the dead body with snow, repeating at the same time the Rosary of the

Bleeding Heart, till warmth returned into it ; furthermore applying well-approved remedies, and pouring reviving cordials down his throat until the dead man opened his eyes."

The listener winced. Those dreadful eyes ! Then, perhaps to conceal his emotion, said, " And did the Saint loosen the strings of the dumb man's tongue ?"

The Prior laid his trembling hand on the inquirer's arm. " Son, son, thou knowest not the import of thy question ! In forcing the cordial down the unfortunate man's throat, our brothers discovered that the organ was altogether wanting, or had been removed by violence ! What ails thee, my son ?" exclaimed the Prior, discontinuing his narrative and laying his hand on the bell which stood at his side. " Is it from over-weariness or sudden sickness that thy countenance pales and changes thus ?"

" Do not summon any one, good father. I am not ill ; it was but the remembrance of a deed of cruelty which your narrative called forth. Continue it, I pray ; my explanation shall follow."

After a long look of earnest interest, during which the hue of health again returned to the manly and expressive features of his guest, the Prior continued,—

" Brother Giovanni, our Sub-prior, a prudent man, as well as pious Catholic, prevailed on me to allow him the sole charge of the Friar, and to keep his residence amongst us as secret as possible. They *spoke*—that is to say, understood—the same language, being both natives of Luxembourg."

" Of Luxembourg, saidst thou ?"

" Yea, verily and this rendered his services at once acceptable and valuable. Thus the Sub-prior became confessor, leech, companion, and nurse to the sick man. The flame kindled at the Saint's intercession was weak and flickering ; it was doubtless his sanctity's purpose to give him time to make a clean breast, and to receive the forgiveness and consolations of the Church. His continual cry—nay, I mean not that, for he remained mute to the last—but all his signs, which the Sub-prior clearly interpreted, as well as his written requests, were that

the Pilgrim, in whose company he left the Hospice, might, if possible, be summoned to hear some revelations of importance he could confide to none other. At this, his earnestly-repeated supplication, and at his own suggestion, we applied to Tell; your appearance here shows how successfully. Yet I could have wished we had been more prompt in securing his services, for on the morning after the despatch of his son to fetch you, unmistakeable signs of approaching dissolution appeared, and the poor sufferer, conscious that he should never personally deliver it, confided this sealed packet to my care: with a solemn injunction to trust it into no other hands but his to whom it is addressed. Does your Highness acknowledge the superscription?" continued the Prior, as he tendered it to his companion, who slightly coloured as he deliberately broke the seals, and detached the string that bound it.

It was addressed to

The Most Noble Prince John of Luxembourg,

and ran thus:—

"You do not come; but one who tarries not for prince or potentate threatens to deprive me of the earnest longing of my soul to receive your forgiveness for my grievous sins against you. I have also another imperative duty to perform. I must assoil my benefactor, the noble Abbot of Koenigsfelden, of all knowledge of my crime, and to do this I will relate the wrongs which urged me to it. Twenty years ago, I was dragged from the honourable house of a loyal race to answer to a charge of sedition (as false as those who forged it) against the Emperor. He condemned me unheard, in spite of my untainted race, and, regardless of our past services, sentenced me—my whole being is convulsed as I write it—to a punishment to which death would have been mercy!—a base, a cowardly, an inhuman sentence—to have my tongue, which had never uttered one disloyal word against the tyrant that doomed it to be plucked out by the roots!

"With its last quivering accents I vowed to revenge the

wrong on its author, and all his race. That author was your father! He died before I was released from the pestilential dungeon in which I passed two years; and then turned out, a mutilated, blasted wretch, on the wide world. My object was to wander as far as my powers would carry me from kindred and country: they had entirely failed when I was discovered by one of the friars and carried into the Abbey of Koenigsfelden, where my benefactor, the Abbot Montolivo, received me with the true beneficence of his noble nature; for he not only offered food and shelter, but taught me how to earn it. Under his gentle rule the fires of revenge might have died out, had not its embers been stirred by a commission given me by my honoured Superior to go in search of you—the son of my bitter foe: to watch your movements, to dog your footsteps—but to do you no harm, either of life or limb.

“ You know how far I exceeded my commission; you will hear from others of the quick-coming vengeance of Heaven; for I must be brief. Let me make the only return I can for the injury I intended by urging you to return without delay to the high duties of your station. Let me warn you that indignation burns at your absence, and insurrection is rife. Would that I could save one who turned aside the arrow that would righteously have avenged his wrongs! The hand of God could not thus be thrust aside; it struck me a few days after, but in mercy. I was conveyed to this abode of piety and charity, where my festering body has been nursed, and my guilty soul assoiled; where I have received the consolations of the Church, and where I die in peace! Vale!

“ GOTFRIED,
“  Minorite unworthy.”

The eye of the Prior anxiously watched the agitated countenance of his companion during the perusal of the mysterious packet. He marked how his hand trembled as he held the manuscript; how his eye rested on some portions of it, whilst his colour, which at one time receded from his quivering lips,

mounted even to his forehead as he offered it to the Superior, begging he would give him his opinion and counsel respecting its contents.

"I can give neither, my son," he said, as he returned the paper, with a trembling hand and blanched cheek, "until you guarantee the truth of these awful disclosures."

"I doubt it not; since, by a wonderful dispensation of Providence, I was a forced witness of the most painful part of them; and, indeed, was the object of the rest. But you shall hear the strange tale. Although twenty years have since passed, and I then numbered but half as many, the scene is fresh as that of yesterday, when I met his pale corse on the mountain side."

"I entreat you explain; had you met before?" interrupted the listener, thus impeding by his eager impatience the explanation he yearned to know.

"Your pardon, holy father; the scene I am about to recall is so unconnected with all others—so distant, so vague—that the circumstances which unite it with the present, if broken, may not again unite."

The Prior answered only by placing his finger on his lips, and the Prince went on:—

"I know nothing of the former history of this unfortunate yet remarkable man, or of the crime laid to his charge; my faint impression is that he was of noble birth, and the leader of an insurrectionary band. My father, at least, believed he was; doubtless misled by evil advisers in his cruel sentence, as he was when he gave his consent to my being present at its execution. My stern tutor deemed I had too soft a heart, and that, like the young bloodhound, I might become more keen for gore when my fangs were steeped in it. He soon discovered and rued his error. Never, even if the Almighty grant me the longest span of man's existence, shall I forget the impression made on my child-mind by that inhuman butchery! Those eyes protruded by agony from their sockets, to which, I believe, they never again returned, haunt my dreams even to the present time.

I afterwards learnt that I was conveyed from the torture chamber in violent convulsions; and that a subsequent fever on the brain for some days threatened to deprive my father of his only son. "Oh God!" continued the narrator, with solemn emphasis, "how just are Thy judgments, and withal how merciful!"

"Amen! amen!" responded the Prior; "but tell me, my gracious son, did you not recognize the Friar on the evening of your arrival here?"

"Not in his identity,—only by a misgiving disgust of those protruding eyes, which seemed ever to be in search of mine. But what other link of memory could there have been between the bulky friar and the writhing attenuated criminal? besides, twenty of the most active years of an active life had passed between our meetings."

"I have yet another question. What means that reference to crime, and petition for pardon?"

"I would fain have the past forgotten, as it is forgiven."

"Nay, nay, my son, this is treating your friend but shabbily, to conduct him into the middle of a wood and leave him to find his way out in the dark." The tone of the kind Prior's remonstrance, though expressive rather of disappointment than anger, lent additional force to its justice.

"I feel your reproof, and my own selfishness in yielding to a repugnance to enter on the hateful subject, and concealing anything which so kind a friend claims to know. I will endeavour to make up for it by increased prolixity."

Notwithstanding this promise, the confidence was not quite entire, as the narrator deemed it prudent to conceal the midnight visit of the Friar, and spare the indulgent Superior the pain of hearing the delinquency of one of his community, whom he looked on as his sons, and treated as such. Commencing his narrative from the moment of leaving the Hospice, the Prince described their descent of the mountain, the beauty of the way, the bearing of his guide, with almost wearying minuteness, as if he feared to enter on the last dreaded passages; but arrived at the fatal bridge, his utterance grew more rapid, his colour

heightened, and the description was almost as fearfully exciting as the reality ; till the changing colour of the poor Prior, and the gripe he laid on his arm, recalled him to something like shame at his own emotion.

“ Pardon me, good father ; I feel less than man when I recollect the power that awful being had—nay, *has*—on me ; I who was cradled in a camp.”

The Prior saw nothing at all astonishing in this fear of a man who was at once powerful and revengeful ; the history of whose direful revenge made his teeth chatter and shook his whole frame. It was well, therefore, both for narrator and listener, that the thoughtful Cellarer now entered with the Prior’s usual noonday refection, somewhat amplified for the honoured guest. They were both exhausted, and the pause was as needful as the refection. Most grateful too, for nerves so shattered, was the Prior’s gouty cordial, no less than a bottle of old canary and the pleasant histories of the donor, the far-renowned prelate, Anselmo, and his isle of refuge amongst the fens of Lincolnshire.

But the meal ended, not even the favourite friend of his youth could withdraw the good Prior’s thoughts from the subject of present interest, and the gratification of another appetite quite as voracious as that which the Cellarer’s fore-thought had so amply catered for.

“ I would not be importunate,” he said, “ but I must remind your Highness of your promise of a full relation of your adventures, in which you have proceeded but half-way. St. Anthony, the guide of the wayfarer, forbid you should have any more of such a nature as you have already described ! ” And here the Prior crossed himself most devoutly, whilst his companion answered,—

“ I will redeem my pledge, holy father, provided you address me as no other than *Pilgrim*, whilst I wear the weeds of one. But, to make my history more intelligible, I must commence it ere I had donned them. I need not enter into any particulars of the late war, which was rife through Europe, seeing that almost every one of its nations have been engaged in it. I

allude to it to say that, at the return of peace, my young squire, De Lauffenburg, craved permission to accompany our well-beloved brother in arms, the renowned Irish chief, De Courcy, on his homeward way as far as the Castle of Hapsburg, where he meant to sojourn awhile; the Castle of Hapsburg, where my betrothed Princess was confined under the guardianship of her dragon uncles. Nothing could fall in better with my humour, and I instantly determined on accompanying them. To go without disguise, was, for me, impossible; so my companions determined on assuming it too: and without stopping to calculate the difficulty and even danger of the attempt, we left the issue to fate. We had a great plaisir in choosing our characters; De Lauffenburg's was cast by nature—”

“ But not so those of the other maskers,” interrupted the Prior, whose countenance, from the combined effect of the cordial and the interest of the story, had resumed its usual brightness. “ I saw that, at a glance; but the minstrel was a puzzle to me altogether, for his likeness to some familiar countenance haunted without enlightening me; his parentage now accounts for it. I knew his father well—he was the son of a cousin of a sister’s son of the—no, I mistake, not a cousin—but there—we will trace his pedigree when I have heard the remainder of your Highness’s story. Still his art was so inborn that I should rather have traced his origin to the friend of the lion-hearted king, the gentle Blondin, than to the race of Hapsburg.”

“ Yet he greatly resembles them in feature.”

“ He does; and most the ex-Emperor Frederick, and his fair daughter.”

“ You knew the Princess Bertha, father?”

“ As a child; but she was not, even then, one that could be forgotten.”

“ Holy Father, you know not how the memory of that gracious child clove unto me—just as she was when she placed her fair arms round my neck, and thanked me as her deliverer. But I cannot linger on the long past, for I must descend the mountain ere close of day, and you will desire to hear the little

I have yet to communicate. When our disguises were fixed on and procured, the unexpected intelligence of Frederick's return from captivity reached our ears, and rather increased my desire to depart; for I conceived the romantic project of disclosing myself to him, and engaging his assistance in carrying off my betrothed bride from her violently opposing uncles. You will not forget the party who claimed your hospitality almost at the outset of their wild adventure?"

"Still less," interrupted the Prior, "the dreadful passages which followed."

"And yet they were well repaid by the friendship of that noble hero, Tell, under whose hospitable roof we spent some days ere we proceeded to Brugg."

"And did you, then, deliver my parcel to my old and well-beloved friend, the Hermit of St. Hilda?"

"I sent it by De Lauffenburg, and in so doing—for naught happens by chance—opened a way of entrance into the otherwise closed gates of Hapsburg. It seemed that our minstrel, on a subsequent visit to the Hermit, had charmed his musical taste by one of his roundelay's."

"At that I do not wonder; his melodious voice might arrest an angel on his way."

"It was not *quite* that," said the narrator, smiling, "but it did enchant two very illustrious listeners, Duke Frederick and his beautiful daughter, who had lost their way in the forest, and arrived to ask direction at St. Hilda's cave, scarcely allowing the minstrel time to escape from it unobserved. The Duke questioned Father Celestine narrowly anent the sweet strains they had heard; and finally desired the hermit to engage the services of the minstrel at an approaching banquet at the Castle. We improved on the hint, got a few mountaineers together, and visited the festive scene in disguise"

The narrator next dwelt, with apparent pleasure, on a scene already fully expatiated on: the brilliant assembly; the minstrel's song; the various guests; until the Prior, anxious to introduce a subject nearer his heart, asked, almost impatiently,

why he heard no mention of the Princess Bertha, whom, he added, "your Highness must have found to have more than fulfilled the promise of her childhood."

"She is passing fair, but—” and here the speaker betrayed considerable embarrassment, adding rapidly, “it may seem strange to confess that I obtained only a distant glance of her beauty. It was my fate that evening, to be placed next one—as fair,” he would have added, but that a sudden exclamation from the Prior checked him [a twinge, probably, of his relentless enemy]. “The seat assigned me was between the Abbot of Kœnigsfelden, and a novice of St. Klare, soon to become a nun in the convent of the ex-Queen of Hungary.”

There now followed a pause in the discourse, which neither party seemed desirous of disturbing, until the native candour and impetuosity of the Prince broke through the embarrassment; and in an impassioned tone he implored the reverend father’s counsel and assistance in rescuing a young creature from a fate she detested.

Ashamed, offended, and astonished, the Prior turned on the pleader a countenance of such reprehensive sternness, so foreign to its usual expression, as awoke him to the equivocal appearance of his petition.

“Nay, holy father,” he said, with more of sorrow than anger, “it is the cause of honourable love I plead, and that not on my own count, but on his whom you so highly affect; for De Lauffenburg’s sake, who loves the dedicated maiden, I implore you to tell me if there be no way to release her from her noviciate vows; which it is always understood are not irrevocable.”

“Thus men pretend; but when is the consecrated vestal permitted to leave her cloister? and if she escape, is she not scorned, and chased like a stricken deer from the herd to which she would return? No, no,” continued the old man with a benevolent smile, whilst tears glistened in his eyes, “let the young bard dream on; dream of his idol in her convent shrine, where years will not dim her beauty in his

eyes, nor the breath of man stain her virgin fame. He will be far less miserable than if she walked by his side through the rugged paths of the world; persecuted by those she has deserted, avoided by those sought,—a poor self-blamed, despised apostate. No, my poor boy, I will not aid thee to thy ruin. Let thy lady-love consummate her sacrifice, and do thou dream on! And yet," continued the Prior, returning to address his companion, "I marvel much that one so conversant with human hearts, both in and out of convents, should have subjected this fair novice, and those who were exposed to the fascination of her charms, to such an ordeal."

The deep sigh which followed this observation, and the equally deep reverie of the person to whom it was addressed, elicited the following question from the observant Prior:—

"And now, my son, let us return to the realities of life; what are your purposes?"

The question did not receive an immediate answer, so much had the good sense and genuine feeling of his aged friend's speech affected the hearer; as well as the affecting picture it drew of the blight on De Lauffenburg's young life.

"What do *I* mean to do?" he said, vaguely, and endeavouring to recall his thoughts. "Why, return to Bohemia, and endeavour to repair the mischief which my reckless neglect has brewed. I shall, too, as beseems my honour and duty, demand the hand of my betrothed, and await all the consequences of such a step, even all chance of the Bohemian crown. If, however, she or her kinsmen refuse my request, I shall secure *that* by espousing the heiress of the late King, whom the salique law shuts out from reigning alone. Thus you see, father, I have no crown to offer the Princess, and that in courting her alliance, I shut myself out from all lawful pretensions to that of Bohemia."

"Yet you have been chosen by the people, and invested with the title."

"Only under the understood event of my becoming the husband of the daughter of their late King."

"Then why not? since I have too plainly seen your heart

is not engaged in the sacrifice, which I fear you will one day repent? Go, fill up your roll of ambition; the Princess Bertha is worthy, not only of the first throne in Christendom, but of the heart of its proudest wearer. I am jealous that she should not be rightly valued."

"Fear me not, reverend father," said the Prince solemnly; "I both esteem and admire her; and I doubt not, if it be my high lot to obtain one so worthy of love, I shall find in my bride all that attached me to her in her childhood, the sweet vision that I have never lost sight of during the years, the stormy years, that have passed since we parted."

The Prince knelt to receive the good Prior's blessing, so tremulously breathed, yet so sincerely offered. Then, pouring out the thanks of his grateful heart, he bade farewell to the Superior and his assembled brethren, and, still accompanied by Tell, wended his way down the mountain, and reached Bellanzoni ere night-fall.

CHAPTER XXX.

A BARONIAL FÊTE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

In days of yore when Minstrels sung,
What mirth through every castle rung!
And every harp to joy was strung
At Christmas.

We now return to our castle of Hapsburg, and find a gay assemblage of bold knights and fair ladies, with a long retinue of attendants, issuing from its portals, hawk on wrist, and hound in leash.

The day fixed for the christening of the infant heir of the Baron Gesler had arrived, and soon after sunrise the royal party set off to join in the amusement of hawking, with which the fêté was to commence. A few hours later, a quieter party passed over the same drawbridge, for it had been arranged by her anxious father that the precious invalid, accompanied by Gertruda, and attended by the Seneschal, should join the cortége just below Castle Bruney; and thus escape the fatigue and excitement of this fashionable sport of the period.

Blandina, too, had wisely bespoken the sage Janet as a safer steed than the one her Princess usually rode—and the half-reasoning animal picked her way so daintily over the rugged road, as showed her to be aware of the value and delicacy of the burden she carried.

Gertruda rode by the Princess's side, their white-haired protector a little behind, and a groom walked at the head of each of the ladies' palfreys.

When this very prudent cavalcade had reached the four diverging paths in the forest, Bertha said, "Let us ask Everard to order the grooms to lead our horses onward; and we will meet them at the turn of the road that leads to the Bruney

heights ; pursuing our way leisurely by the side of St. Hilda's stream."

It was one of those calm autumnal days when Nature seems to pause, as if unwilling to hasten the approach of winter, and part with the fair hours of brighter seasons. Yet the irrevocable decree goes forth, and though

"No breeze disturb the goss'mer web,
Or waft the winged seed to its repose,"

the tinted and sapless leaf falls circling to the earth.

"There is a shade of coming winter over the woodlands," said Gertruda ; "already the trees are becoming bare, the flowers are faded, and all else methinks seems passing away."

"And yet the robin is straining his little throat, and the squirrel cracking his nuts and hopping from tree to tree with almost summer glee."

"It is so—and if ever I think with envy of this world of thine, dear Princess, it will be of the lot of these denizens of the woods."

"This world of mine ! ah, you know not how weary I am of it already."

"Then why not—ah, why not—go back with me to our convent ?"

"Rather let me ask—why thou dost not remain in the liberty thou hast but now professed to envy ?"

Bertha had preceded her friend on the narrow path, and, as she turned round for an answer, she perceived that her fair face was wet with tears.

"Sit down here, sweetheart," she said soothingly ; "I have long desired to see thee alone ; we will rest awhile on the root of this old tree. Time passes, oh, how swiftly ! and the dreaded hour of separation draws nigh. A few more days and we must part—let it not be for ever !"

"For ever ! what a dreadful word !"

"Alas ! I must repeat it. If thou still persist in burying thyself in the cloisters of Koenigsfelden, thou wilt be to me as dead."

“And but for you, and one more loving heart, I would I were at rest by the side of my saintly aunt, within a nameless grave.”

“Why, dearest Gertruda, why this despairing wish? If indeed I am dear to you, why not remain with me and share my fate, be it in palace or prison? Methinks the dreariest waste, the humblest hut, would be an Eden in comparison.”

“Press me not, most beloved benefactress,” said Gertruda, clasping her hands beseechingly, the tears rolling down her pale cheeks; “my doom is fixed. I cannot retract; I would not, for I have a duty to fulfil to which my aunt has vowed me. You shall know ere we part what that vocation is, and the sacred tie which binds me to fulfil it. But, even were I free from vow and obligation, what should *I* do in a cold scoffing world, an orphan child of proscribed parents?”

“Cannot *I* shield thee?—cannot *I*—”

The unfinished sentence died on the lips of the generous, unselfish Bertha, checked by a sense of her own powerless position: and the friends sat some time endeavouring to conquer the emotion which their mutual confidence had excited.

Bertha was victor; and recollecting the gay gathering to which they were bound, and how necessary it was to assume at least an appearance of cheerfulness, she roused herself to change the subject.

“We have been so much separated lately,” she began, with this intent, “that I have innumerable little inquiries to make touching your doings this same week in which *I* have kept my chamber.”

“Week!” repeated Gertruda, “it seems to me an age.”

“And yet, all reckoned, it is but seven days; and, what is yet more wonderful, but three times seven since we left our convent.”

“It is one consolation,” said Gertruda, as if speaking words of comfort to herself, “that time glides away more unmarked in convent life.”

“Because, I wot, like Sister Eva, in her woollen sandals, it

has no trace or sound. Because the day is a lengthened twilight, sans sunshine or moonbeams—”

“ You must at least allow,” said Gertruda, continuing the parallel, with a melancholy smile, “ that there are neither thunderstorms nor hurricanes.”

“ True: cloud or rainbow, seed-time or harvest; but a truce to banter. Tell me, sweetheart, what were the events which swelled the last week into years ?”

“ There was no twilight then, I warrant. Hunting and hawking, banquets and balls, kept up perpetual sunshine; your absence was the only cloud.”

“ The stranger Knights were of course present at these merry-makings ?”

“ All but one, who left the Castle on the morning after the first ball.”

“ You talk of feasts and balls; you forget music in the list of your enjoyments. Did not our minstrel cousin repeat his enchantments ?”

“ He pretends that his art lies in his minstrel cloak and badge, and refuses to sing in other guise.”

“ I must assert my cousinly prerogative, and prove to him that ‘ a bird that can sing and won’t sing must be made to sing.’ Oh, maiden, canst thou ever forget his strains ?”

“ And yet,” replied Gertruda, blushing rosy red, “ I assure you it is the Earl de Courcy who wins all hearts and rivets all eyes. No one, all the world says, is to be compared to him for gentle courtesy and knightly grace. Prince Leopold declares he must transfer his title of ‘ the glory of chivalry ’ to this mirror of chevaliers.”

“ Do my cousins, Alice and Aletta, join the hunting parties ?”

“ Always. It is their sire’s desire they should. The Princess Alice needs no pressing; and, at first, the Lady Aletta equally liked the sport, but she soon tired of it, and then took to going with her Highness to the Abbey masses.”

“ To Kœnigsfelden ! Nay, thou jestest. She had a very terror of the place.”

"She *had*; but something—and yet I know not what—has changed her humour on this and other matters. For example, instead of the sisters being, as dear old Father Swithin said of you and I, 'like twin doves in Venus' car,' Aletta now shows a stronger liking to bide at *my* side. The other day we went together, at the Abbess's bidding, to walk in the convent garden, and the Abbot joined us, and there," continued the poor girl, with a smile of genuine pleasure, "we met Father Swithin and Henga, and you can't think how well content the lad was to see me again."

Bertha marked that smile, and benevolently continued the topic which had drawn it forth, till they arrived at the Trysting Bridge, where their horses and attendants awaited them.

As the friends rode onward towards the scene of the day's entertainments, we will say a few words explicative of its site and the honoured host of the royal gathering, who was, we trust, more worthy notice than his world-known ancestor.

The Castle of Gealer's son was—nay, is—situated on the top of one of the high sugar-loaf hills which rise so abruptly from the plain that stretches below the promontory crowned by the now ruined tower of Hapsburg, to the town of Brugg, near which stands all that remains of the Abbey of Koenigsfelden, as already stated.* Here, too, once flourished the Roman colony of Viandessa; and here, unchanged and unceasing through all the variations of man's history, meet the three glacier streams—the Aar, the Limmat, and the Reuss, which, issuing from their icy caves, and fed by the everlasting snow, meet and join; like friends whose fate is united, and who journey together to one goal.

The Castle to which the invited guests were hastening, more than five centuries ago, stood, as now, on its picturesque eminence, and was approached by the same long flight of steps; but never again will so illustrious a party be congregated at their base. These steps, cut in the soil, are not perceived until the traveller arrives directly below the Castle

* See introductory chapter.

steep, so that when, panting and weary, he has climbed the steep mountain path, he must despair of reaching the building save by the help of wings. Happily, in default of these untenable locomotives, chairs, borne on men's shoulders, were provided for the lady guests; in one of which, all too narrow for her ample dimensions, the Baroness von Hompe was seated; who, the better to secure her equilibrium, as it vibrated now on one side and again on the other, had grasped the shaggy locks of her bearers, staggering beneath the unwonted load. The sister Princesses on their milk-white palfreys, each holding a hawk on their wrist, were surrounded by a crowd of ready attendants, squires and pages. One dismounted cavalier, more favoured than the rest, stood holding a rein of each of their steeds; and many were the laughing glances which watched the ascent of their lady Governante.

Our woodland wanderers emerged from their brushwood path a few hundred paces from the Castle, and thus commented on the scene before them,—

“There they all are,” said Bertha; “we are just in time. How well those little *Nimrodias* sit their horses! That tall cavalier, holding their palfreys’ reins, is, I opine, your all-conquering De Courcy. I marvel if he has yet learnt to discern between the sisters?”

“I rather think he has,” replied Gertruda significantly; “for see how coaxingly he lures the falcon from the Lady Alice’s wrist, and how he caresses the pretty bird, whilst he leaves Aletta’s to the care of the Falconer.”

“True; but now Duke Leopold has taken the maiden and her bird under his care, and observe, I pray, how the pert creature looks at its mate, pluming himself the while, as if his glancing eye would say, ‘See, I am on a mightier perch than thou.’ ”

“It is pleasant,” said Gertruda, “to watch Duke Leopold when near his daughters. It is like the withdrawal of a wintry cloud from the sun’s face.”

With the exception of the recent invalid,—whose bearers

showed by their quickened steps the pleasure at the exchange of their burden—the younger ladies, headed by Alice and Aletta, and their knightly attendants, ascended the steps on foot, and arrived in time to swell the christening procession which was forming in the court of the Castle. The chapel was decked for the occasion with a profusion of wax-lights, banners, draperies, flowers, and evergreens. The Abbot (who had postponed his episcopal visitation for one day to fulfil the engagement) stood ready to receive the infant, whose young mother and her gallant Lord felt proudly happy at the praises bestowed on their infant heir. And well did he merit them for his uncomplaining endurance of the heavy load of embroidered gold and silver cloth with which his tender limbs were swathed.

At the banquet that followed, etiquette assigned a place for Bertha beside her uncle Leopold. His daughters took theirs opposite, whilst Frederick and his Duchess occupied the seats on either side of their hostess. The royal Dukes, the Abbot, and a few of the elder noblemen, being the only seated gentlemen.

It was the pride and pleasure of the noble host to take his stand behind his royal guests and wait on them: and the gentlemen present would have deemed their chivalry tarnished not to have been allowed to share in this pleasing service. All menials were restricted to that of carrying the viands, &c., to and fro between buttery and hall.

As the younger Knights and Squires took their stand behind the ladies of their choice, many sly glances were exchanged by the lookers-on; whilst the blushes and downcast eyes of the young beauties at this public avowal of a half-hoped-for, half-doubted conquest, sufficiently confirmed their meaning. No blush was deeper, no eye brighter than that of the Princess Alice, as De Courcy knelt on one knee gracefully to proffer his devoir.

“They are a lovely pair,” thought the observant Bertha—and her pious, affectionate spirit flew upwards to implore a blessing on their union; and then she glanced at Aletta, too, but her warm aspirations fell cold on her heart, for she had

observed that De Lauffenburg had bent the knee and offered his services to her; and fancied that there was little but cold etiquette in her acceptance. "It will not do," she said mentally; "that ardent gifted soul must have something more than girlish playfulness, something—"

"Why does my fair niece," said Leopold, breaking in on her cogitations, "fix her eyes on her opposite neighbours, whilst the Duke de Castlemare is waiting for an approving glance from them?"

Bertha apologized with a sweetness that the young nobleman felt was worth a year's waiting. She, moreover, gracefully accepted his offered service, and would have further continued to converse with him had not her uncle, who was in unusual good humour, claimed her attention.

"I never," he said, whilst directing it to his daughters, "till this moment, saw any superiority in Alice's countenance over her sister's; but dost not thou observe how much more of mirth and fancy there is in her favour?"

"I see it *now*," replied Bertha, unconsciously laying a stress on the last word.

Leopold smiled: "I see you have guessed the secret; and where is the woman, be she peasant or princess, whose eyes would not sparkle at such a suitor as that? Setting aside his rich inheritance and noble, yea, royal blood, which he inherits from the melesion kings (advantages which at Alice's young years are of secondary import), his valour and high bearing, his comely form and graceful deportment, might win any maiden's heart. I would I could match my little Aletta as well. These are perilous times, and One above only knows how soon my children may be orphans."

This was said in a low tone, evidently meant only for Bertha's ear, who was deterred from answering by the oppressive observation of the Abbot who sat near, and though ostensibly engaged in the requirements of etiquette towards his lady neighbour, she felt assured had heard all that had passed between herself and uncle. It was not to be supposed that the subject of their conversation was unsuspected, but he was

not the less interested in listening to its full confirmation. He had watched the young lovers during their frequent meetings the last week ; he had yet more narrowly scanned the bearing of the father ; and now that all his vague expectations had become realities, he turned from the brilliant happiness of the one sister to the pale dejection of the other ; and schemes which he had despaired of effecting, again took possession of his thoughts.

And what were the prelate's dreams ? That a scion of Hapsburg should bear rule, and give stability and prestige to the Convent of Koenigsfelden, when the infirm health of Agnes would, as he deemed it, soon deprive it of her important services—and for this he would snatch a young creature from the gushing beauties of life's spring days, to enclose her in a living tomb. Short-sighted man ! That awful being, whose anticipated death he thus plotted to supply, was fated long to survive him ; and to see many of the descendants of two successive generations laid in the Abbey cloisters.

The ball, as a matter of course, succeeded to the banquet, and as Bertha pleaded her disabled foot, Alice, at her father's desire, opened it with the host by one of those national dances that display grace and agility, without any sacrifice of decorum. Balls have been the same gay noisy pastimes, we suppose, ever since men and women met together on festive occasions.

The gavot danced by our maiden queen, the sinuous minuet, the homely country dance, the bewildering reel, the graceful cotillon, or more modern quadrille, are but national shades and exhibitions of decorous hilarity ; it was left to our advanced—but, in this instance, surely less refined—age to introduce a dance which our fore-mothers would have blushed to behold. But we return to our mediæval dances and dancers, and to report that the Princess Alice's performance was warmly commended. Ah, happiness is a beautifying and grace-diffusing element ; the fair girl became yet fairer under its influence, and her movements lighter and more expressive. Still there were eyes in that assembly that were turned from the graceful little fairy to

the contemplation of beauty and expression of a higher order.

"Your Austrian Princess is a jewel of the first water. I marvel not that kings should covet such to deck their crowns ithal."

This observation was addressed to the Abbot by the Neapolitan Ambassador; but it was answered cautiously, and in his native tongue, as he turned towards Bertha:—

"Of fine water certainly, and worthy the diadem of fair Apoli. You must gain it for your master."

"And that I will, so help me St. Marco! or drown myself in the Reuss. Yet, holy—yet, holy father," and the voice of the speaker trembled as he added, "will he—will any mortal man be worthy of such a prize? I speak not of the beauty of the Lady Bertha, fair as she may be: it is her wisdom, her intelligence, the gentle accents that fall from her lips, the heaven that beams in her eye—"

"Poor Castelmare!" thought the half-scornful, half-pitying noble, as the nobleman obeyed a summons from Frederick and approached him and his daughter, "what puppets mortals are! It is well there are heads and hands steady enough to catch their wanderings as they are blown here and there by every breeze of destiny, and hands to guide the strings and illeys by which they are steered. The twilight moth that torcheth its little life out in the lamp's rays is not more self-immolating. I will see to the poor flutterer anon, but must now go play my wires in another direction."

He stopped a few minutes, looking with grave investigation in every side, and, as at length he moved on, he saluted with dignified, affability the crowd that opened at his approach, and returned his salutation with profound respect.

He found the objects of his search in the embrasure of a window, at the farther and most retired part of the spacious hall-room.

"Your royal mistress has been demanding you, Baroness," said, as he took her vacated seat between Gertruda and Letta, bidding them resume theirs, from which they had

risen at his approach. The delighted governante did not wait for another bidding.

“I go, my Lord; but, first, I am sure, your reverence will sanction what I have urged on my royal and noble charge, that a little innocent recreation is wholesome and right for all true daughters of holy Mother Church; and as blessed Mary honoured the marriage feast at Canaan, permitting her Son to partake of the same, and as she no doubt danced as well as feasted so now, the banquet being ended, it is a beseeming compliment to our noble and right hospitable host and hostess that we—that is the Princess Aletta, the novice, and even my humble self—should, by joining the dance, show our gratitude to them, as well as due honour to the example of the blessed Mother of—”

“We will talk of this matter another time,” interrupted the Abbot; “but, as far as your noble self is concerned, if the Duchess can dispense with your attendance, you have my permission to tread a measure at your pleasure, and I will take watch over your charge until your return.”

Away flew, or perhaps it would be more descriptive to say swam, the emancipated Baroness; and, rid of an element so uncongenial to his purpose, the Abbot entered at once on the object of his mission with the delicate tact of which he was master.

His discourse was ostensibly addressed to Gertruda, but was not the less intended for the more timid victim, whom he was well aware a more direct appeal would alarm; but, while his eye rested on one, he knew that the spell acted alike on both.

“Thou doest well, my daughter,” he began, “to place thyself thus aside from the crowd, as it is only when disentangled from its maze that we can rightly judge of its folly. Yet, for the herd such amusements are not only innocent, but needful. For *you*, who have been selected as the honoured spouse of Christ, whose vows are already registered in heaven—and, indeed, for all who have a holier, loftier vocation—mirth is folly and earthly enjoyment vanity. It is through the senses alone that such can reach the heart. For, shut but your ears, and

how senseless seem the movements and entanglements of the dance ! close your eyes, and how confused and deafening the universal din ! This ball-room is but a picture of human life—the same ceaseless bustle, the same jostling and striving, the same outward joy and inward discontent. Happy, thrice happy, are those whom God calls from such restless scenes to the holy retirement of a convent. Yea, verily, my beloved daughter, thou hast chosen the better part."

He then went on to draw a picture of the delights of a devotion almost as earthly as the amusements he had deprecated, if not censured ; and when he deemed the subject had been sufficiently expatiated on, he assumed a more lively tone, and pointing to Bertha and Alice, who, each in her way, was enjoying the passing scene, observed,—

" I never saw our young Princesses yonder so animated and complacent. Surely your fair sister," turning to Aletta, " is inspired with some new desire to please. The Princess Bertha, too, is unusually content."

The tear that stood in Aletta's eye, the downcast look of her companion, proved to the wily schemer that his observation was felt by both. He was not, as we have seen, a naturally cruel man, and he would gladly afford them every consolation but that which impeded his own projects. He bade them seek it in their mutual love, and the especial protection of the Virgin Mary and her handmaid, St. Klare.

The dance now ceased, and numerous serving-men carried round massive salvers heaped with cakes and sweetmeats, followed by others offering rich cordials and wines of renowned vintages.

" My dear daughters," said the Abbot, as he rose to escort his charge to the Archduchess, " it grieves me to bid you farewell for an unusually lengthened absence, but I have already postponed for some days the call of duty for that of friendship. I have, however, confided you to the care of your confessor, whom you will obey as my representative."

The royal party now rose to take leave. The stirrup-cup, a vase of richly-chased silver, was carried round filled with a

spiced cordial, the receipt for the concoction of which (together with that of the quinte essenze) is we fear indubitably lost, although some antiquarians surmise that the “loving cup” circulated at our Lord Mayor’s feast is composed of similar ingredients.

After this exquisite cordial had been partaken of by the royal party, and then passed round to the other guests, came acknowledgments for hospitality received and honour conferred, and the festive party broke up.

The host attended his royal guests down the brilliantly-illuminated steps, at the bottom of which litters were in waiting to convey the ladies to the Castle, the gentlemen accompanying them on horseback.

As the Abbot rode slowly home on his well-trained mule, the brilliant schemes for the future aggrandizement of his order faded before the difficulties of the present, amongst which the painful necessity of leaving the Abbey on the morrow under the dominion of the new Prior stood prominently forward. He had other causes of anxiety which rendered his absence at this time peculiarly inconvenient. The continued silence of the dumb friar, the mysterious illness of the Princess’s tire-woman, and, more recently, the sudden departure of the Leech, all increased his almost undefined apprehensions of coming evil. He had narrowly questioned Anselmo, and with little result but that of a newly-awakened doubt of the fidelity of that hitherto trusted emissary. Neither did the farewell interview he sought immediately on his return with the mistrusted friar tend in any way to allay his fears, although it fixed his determination of returning home as soon as his indispensable engagements could be concluded or shortened.

Early on the following morning the prelate left the Abbey with a large retinue of monks, and as he passed through the streets of Brugg the old people crowded round him to ask his blessing, the mothers holding up their little ones to gain a passing smile. When the procession had passed, little groups were heard to remark on their good Abbot’s altered looks, and the lowered tone of his usually cheerful voice.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BRIDES ELECT.

ON her return from the christening fête, the Princess Bertha found Blandina, as usual, in waiting; and after, as was her wont, relating to her faithful nurse the principal events of the day, she disengaged her tresses from hands that lingered lovingly amid their silken luxuriance, and insisted on her retiring to her rest, which had of late been so interrupted. When left alone, in spite of her prudent conclusion in regard to the absence of one whose presence was more essential to her happiness than she dared to confess; she could not quite keep down all uneasy conjectures as to the cause of his non-appearance. And then came the tangle of hopes and fears, of doubts and assurance, by which most of those who have lived, and all who have loved, in every age, have occasionally been assailed.

But our heroine's troop of busy fancies were soon put to flight by the return of poor sleepy Blandina. She was accompanied by Gertruda, who came to seek the key of the turret oratory, in which she said their confessor had ordered Aletta and herself to remain engaged in devotional exercises until matinals.

Bertha had begun a strong remonstrance on the risk of taking the poor nervous child thither when Aletta entered. She had exchanged her festal habit for that of a penitent, and the coarse black hood drawn over her pretty child-like face increased its pallor and unnatural stillness. There was no excitement in her aspect or fire in her eyes; but something so touchingly mournful in her whole being that Bertha could not refrain her tears as she supplicated her to defer her visit to the oratory at least for that night.

Her entreaties were in vain, and she saw them ascend the staircase with too true an anticipation of the consequence.

There was now no thought of rest, and Blandina followed the Princess into her apartment, occasionally creeping into the corridor to listen at the foot of the stairs, from which nothing could be heard but the monotonous repetition of the young devotees' appointed task.

"Let us follow their example," said Bertha, "as she opened some of the beads of the Hermit's casket, on which they both commented with an eager delight, scarcely to be fully estimated by those from whom the full stream of inspiration is not withheld.

After this, the Christian friends knelt together in the simple oratory within the princess's sleeping apartment, unprofaned by carved image or gaudy trapping. All was still when they rose from their knees, and remained a few moments in devout reflection.

Again Bertha renewed her entreaties to her nurse to retire to her needful repose.

"Our fears, I trust, are groundless; all will go quietly in the oratory."

"It may be," answered Bandina, in a low tone, "that the movers of the plot are afraid to repeat the dangerous experiment. Let them have a care! The Princess Aletta's nerves will not bear tension, and woe worth the hour they provoke the vengeance of Duke Leopold!"

"They know his humour too well to cross it; so go to thy couch, dear nurse, in peace."

"I will obey; only permit me to listen one moment at the bottom of the turret-steps."

"And I will accompany thee, to see thou dost not break through thy compact."

They quitted the chamber together, but had not crossed the corridor ere a faint scream was audible to both, and they rushed as fast as their trembling limbs would carry them up the winding staircase, and entered the "chamber of imagery."

Here they found Gertruda, herself pale and almost powerless, endeavouring to raise Aletta, who had fallen fainting on the steps of the altar.

Blandina, whose presence of mind had provided for the emergency, applied the usual restoratives; and after some anxious moments the poor little victim opened her eyes only to close them again on Blandina's bosom, to whom she clung with earnest entreaties to be taken to her own apartment.

Whilst this invaluable nurse watched by the little trembler, in entire forgetfulness of her own fatigue, Bertha detained Gertruda gently to remonstrate with her on the imprudence of exposing Aletta's weak nerves to the ordeal she had but too good reason to suspect awaited them in that fearful chamber?

"I knew it all, I feared it all," she answered, the tears fast rolling over her pale cheeks; "but how could I disobey the commands of our confessor?"

"And will you, Gertruda, still persist in writhing under such unholy tyranny? Oh, give but your consent, and you are free. Believe me, these are no idle words."

The remembrance of the powerful aid she had been offered, and the promise she had made in the ball-room, gave hope and energy to the pleader, and for one moment Gertruda listened to the siren's voice; the banished colour rushed into her cheeks, and her eyes were raised in momentary brightness, as if a ray of hope had penetrated into the darkness of her soul. But it was soon extinguished, and she said resignedly,—

"My beloved friend, it is all in vain. I am bound by two indissoluble ties—my vows to the Church and to my aunt—and why should I regret it? Who but yourself do I leave behind in this busy world who will miss the poor orphan of proscribed parents? I do not murmur at my lot; a few weeks ago I imagined it the one for which I had a decided vocation. Weep not for me, my best, my only friend, but turn all your efforts to save Aletta. She knows not, unless the events of

this evening have taught her, the sacrifice required of her. Oh, save, save Aletta!"

With these words, and a long and tender embrace, Gertruda quitted her friend, on whose ear her parting accents hung like a death knell: "Save, save Aletta!"

Blandina could not tear herself from the young Princess's clinging arms until, the cheerful light of the morning calming her nervous excitement, she fell into a tranquil slumber, leaving the anxious creature at liberty to seek her more immediate charge.

She found her pale and exhausted, and at last succeeded in prevailing on her to remain until the midday repast in her own apartments, on promising she would herself retire to rest after the business of the toilette was over. Had, however, the careful nurse foreseen how much her lady's retirement would have been broken in on, she would hardly have left the duties of the antechamber to have been fulfilled by little Hans, who, as we have seen, at the earnest recommendation of Sister Eva, had been promoted to the office of page to the Princess Bertha.

The first arrival was that of Duke Leopold, who cut poor Hans's well-conned emblazonment short by lifting the boy up by the collar as he would his daughter's lap-dog, and setting him down not very gently on one side, whilst he very unceremoniously announced himself, and briefly and authoritatively told his astonished niece "that he came to announce the approaching marriage of one of her cousins, and the determination of the other to take the veil in the convent of Koenigsfelden."

"In dear Alice's happy prospect," said Bertha, as she raised her uncle's proffered hand to her lips, "I do most affectionately participate; but oh, my uncle, can *you* consent to part with Aletta thus?"

"'Tis e'en so, Bertha. Stern necessity owns no law, hears no plea. I feel," and as he spoke Leopold pressed his hand on his wide forehead, "that these brains are hatching death or madness, and that ere long my children will be orphans.

Moreover, the sword is leaping from its scabbard ; and who can count the hazards of war ? *Now*, come what may, I shall enter the battle-field with a firmer step and lighter heart when I know that one of my little maidens is under the protection of De Courcy, and the other safe in that of the Church, where her prayers may obtain for her guilty sire some remission from the pangs of purgatory."

"But oh, my uncle, think on the sacrifice ! You know not Aletta's timid spirit as I do ; you cannot tell as I can the misery, the life-long misery she will be called on to endure."

"I tell thee, niece, it is her own choice ; else sooner would I consume in everlasting torment. Moreover, I have no alternative. Where else should I find a shelter for my trembling dove ? I have no home, not a rood of land to call my own. Where would she cower when I am at the war stretched, perchance lifeless, on the bloody field ?"

"Where ? *Here* in my father's, her own uncle's house."

Leopold's eyes almost glared with a fierce and scornful intensity.

"And if that kinsman persist in his drivelling dream of honour, as he terms it, that home will be a prison."

Bertha mastered the strong emotion which was tearing her heart, and answered with calm dignity.

"Then, at least, I might entreat my sister-cousin to share mine."

Leopold seized both her hands, pressing them in his iron grasp, whilst the glare of his eyes was quenched in the tears fast gathering in them.

"*Thy* home ! Poor child, hast thou yet to learn how little dependence can be placed on the breath of princes or the tide of human affairs ? *Thy* home ! yes ;" and his tone resumed its bitterness. "If thou art wise, thou mayest still have a home in one of earth's fairest territories. The fate, perchance, of the House of Austria hangs on a thread, and thou holdest the shears."

"I do beseech you, good my uncle," said Bertha, "expound

your dark sayings ; my poor comprehension cannot fathom them."

" Bertha," he replied solemnly, " thou hast an understanding above thy woman's nature, riper than thy maiden years. Thou lovest thy father and thy kindred ; thou hast regard to the honour of thy race. Wilt thou make a sacrifice to save both ? Ay, promise me ;" and he laid his heavy hand on her shoulder. " Nay, why dost thou shrink, poor child ? I propose no hard exchange—fertile Italy for barren Bohemia. A suitor ready to barter half his kingdom for the hand thy miscreant betrothed cares not to—"

" Stop, my uncle, stop ! A light has now fallen on your—and yet I would mistrust it ; for surely you would not ask my acceptance of proposals that would compromise my father's honour or my own faith. Sooner than forfeit his word to the Emperor, my noble sire would suffer a life-long captivity ; and rather than forfeit her's to Prince John, his daughter will share it with him."

" Thus let it be, proud maiden !" said Leopold, with bitter indignation ; " and may captivity and desertion lecture thy haughtiness ! Yet, hear me, and take heed Sooner than a princess of my race shall mate with the boar of Bohemia, this sword shall drink his heart's blood."

The fierce contortion of the frenzied Duke, as on leaving the apartment he shrieked out the warning word, " Beware !" his long brawny arms and broadly-developed forehead contrasting with his dwarfish form, gave to it an oracular, nay, almost demoniacal expression, which, but that her thoughts and fears were diverted to another and most interesting apparition, would have terrified the object of his adjurations.

This fair vision glided into the apartment so swiftly and noiselessly as even to elude the alacrity of the page, and embracing her cousin, received her congratulations with tears as well as smiles.

Amid the delicious dream of a first and sanctioned love, the Lady Alice had perceived and mourned over her sister's

estrangement and dejection, and yet more on account of her determination to enter a convent.

"She will repent," she said, sobs impeding her utterance. "I know she will bitterly repent when it will be all too late. She, whose bright bird-like spirit cannot bear restraint, will beat her little heart out against those hateful bars,—she, to whom the very name of Koenigsfelden was wormwood! Oh, why was I so selfishly engrossed in my own interests as to blind me to hers? I might, had I earlier attended to her changed humour—nay, I *would* have prevented this fatal resolution. Oh, my sister!" continued the affectionate girl, "why wert thou so estranged? Wert thou not my second self? Had we not the same pursuits, the same tastes, the same hatreds, the same loves?"

She stopped and blushed, the tears dried on her glowing cheeks, and her eyes gleamed with the lofty spirit of her race, as she added,—

"Bertha, I solemnly declare to you that if I were assured *his* preference of me was the cause of her unhappiness, rather than she should entomb herself in that hated Abbey, under the rule of our dreaded aunt, I would even now kneel at De Courcy's feet, and implore him to transfer his troth to Aletta, who is far more deserving of it."

"He is not of that mind, my love," said Bertha, tenderly embracing the little heroine; "and were he even to consent to your proposal, hearts, we all know, cannot be transferred."

Neither did her cousin coincide with Alice's opinion of her inferiority; and she gave De Courcy great credit for discerning, where the outward resemblance was so bewildering, the superiority both in mind and disposition of the lady of his choice.

After assuring Alice that she would do all in her power to avert her sister's fate, by interesting her father in the cause, Bertha wiped the tears from her cousin's brightening eyes, saying cheerfully,—

"Now go, my coz, for here is my new little page come to say Duke Leopold and *some one else* are waiting for you

to mount. Be comforted, be hopeful, and all may yet go right."

The next visitor, the Archduke Frederick, moved so slowly through the corridor, and stood so thoughtfully at the door of his daughter's apartment, as if to give little Hans an opportunity of showing off the graceful bow and slide taught him by his patroness, and of ushering in his Highness with all his titles, which he did at the top of his boy treble.

Such, however, was not the reason of the Duke's tardy approach to her whom he best loved; he knew he had none but heavy tidings to impart, and he shrank with keen reluctance from the task. He therefore felt relieved at finding Blandina with the Princess.

"Don't run away, nurse," he said kindly; "thou art doubtless busy in preparation for to-morrow's journey to Neu Hapsburg, whither thou wilt accompany thy lady."

"If your Highness would excuse my boldness, I would say our Princess is not yet so far recovered as to bear the fatigue; and, if you would graciously allow her to remain in the Castle during the absence of the Court (a proposal I have gained her Highness to further), I humbly opine that, by the blessing of God, such rest would restore her to health and cheerfulness."

Frederick looked at his daughter's pale cheek, and anxiously noted the weariness and dejection of her whole being.

"Thou wert always wise and considerate, my good Blandina," he said, "and if thou canst gain the consent of the Duchess, as thou sayest thou hast that of thy mistress, thou shalt also have mine. I know how little I should have of thy sweet converse, my Bertha, or I fear I could not consent to thy remaining behind; but I commit thee to the care of thy good nurse, whose counsel I feel to be right."

He then gave some directions to Blandina, charging her to seek advice from the Leech, and as well to induce her charge to take gentle exercise in the open air; and would have taken leave of his daughter, almost glad to be spared at any cost the painful confession he came to make, but she detained him to

supplicate his assistance in averting the threatened doom of her friend and cousin.

The Archduke listened to her animated appeal with interest, and expressed his displeasure at the destination of his niece, although he did not as warmly enter into Bertha's with regard to Gertruda.

"Poor little Aletta," he said, "is a child in years, and yet more in the knowledge of her own heart. Gertruda is somewhat older, and of superior abilities. She is, at least, experienced in the vocation she has chosen. The world has little to offer even to the most prosperous; but for *her*, poor, stricken deer, where else could she hide from its arrows? Yet, my beloved child, if thou could'st point out any way in which I could help these devoted maidens—"

He paused for a reply, which Bertha seemed unable to give, and then continued, as if speaking to himself,—

"Aletta might sojourn with Alice; 'twere a pity the sisters should sunder. I have heard a rumour somewhere that De Lauffenburg sighed for the little maiden, and was pining under her scorn. Surely such rare merit as his must turn her from her foolish whim for convent maidenhood. You do not answer, Bertha."

"My thoughts were turned to Gertruda. If both are equally dear, her peril is nearest, for her next vows will be irrevocable. I feel hopeful that Aletta may be persuaded to delay hers, but it will not be by De Lauffenburg's entreaties. No, dear father, much as I love my cousin, I feel sure she never can be the lady of *his* love."

After renewed promises of assistance, which included poor Inna in the kind Archduke's interest, he took an affectionate leave of his daughter, adding with evident emotion,—

"I pray God, my Bertha, to support and comfort you, and that on my return I may find you strengthened to bear the full discussion of what I am not now, nor you, my poor child, able to enter on.

The little court of Hapsburg, swelled by the attendance of some of the neighbouring families, yet leaving behind them

its chief ornament, set off the next day with a gallant array of knights and retainers, horse, hound, and hawk, for their hunting castle on the most beautiful and most storied of lakes.

We do not pause to describe the various interests and pursuits of the party—the shrines and churches visited by the devout—the varied and retired walks threaded by the lovers, the sublime solitudes haunted by the poet, and the fishing, hunting, and hawking, for which lake, forest, and mountain alike purveyed. Still less do we presume to penetrate into the secrets of the midnight meetings on mountain side or forest depths—the quiet life and simple recreations of our heroine and her attendant being more in harmony with the sober tints of our pencil.

Bertha's first impulse on finding herself sole lady of the Castle was to summon the House-dame, to learn all the intelligence she could impart of the state of her vanished tire-woman; whilst Blandina's earliest care was to despatch a messenger to summon the Leech. The result in both instances was unsatisfactory: the doctor could not be found, and poor Inna could be traced no farther than the morning on which she had been carried off from the Castle, by order of the Prior, ostensibly to convey her to the hospital at Brugg, and, as we have seen, in direct opposition to the commands of his superior.

Here, then, was food for painful conjecture, and it needed all Blandina's efforts to draw away the Princess's thoughts from the anxious forebodings that filled her own. Amongst other resources, she most confided in the efficacy of exercise in the open air, and therefore asked the loan of gentle Mignon from her ever-ready owner: and mounting her mistress thereon, she walked by her side, trusting to the ingenuity and local knowledge of little Hans to guide them through the intricacies of the forest, or up the narrow windings of the mountain paths.

The little urchin was himself a source of great amusement, although sometimes of annoyance, to his companions. Boys certainly are the most *sui-generic* portion of God's creation.

Hans, in the year 1326 or thereabout, was of the exact type—barring, perhaps, a little more flourish of manner and angularity of form—a sort of black-letter edition of the boys of 18. It matters not what the habit and customs of the age may be, the boy is still the same. Our little mediæval sprite would have pulled out every bird's-nest which his prying boy nature discovered on his way, broken its bead-like eggs, or dashed the unfledged inmates to the ground—just as the cruel species do still—but for the stern reproof of the Princess and the more impressive box on the ear inflicted by Blandina.

But energies restrained in one way will find a vent in another. By some freemasonry, known only between dogs and boys, Hans incited his exceedingly demure-looking lurcher every now and then, silently, without growl or bark, to bite Mignon's heels, and even to tear Blandina's cloak. The *instigator* of these daring outrages having been discovered by her searching eye, she administered her former corrective with double power, which quieted both animals for a time, and forced the least rational of them to turn his boy faculties into a less annoying direction.

Hans now betook himself to purveying for the wants and tastes of himself and party, dog inclusive, for the genus are wonderful in the commissariat department. He collected flowers and wild strawberries for his lady, and medicinal herbs for Blandina. Then, to make it up with Mignon, he knew where to cull bouquets of the most grateful herbage; and, for his own special gratification, there were nuts in abundance; and if Snap, in his industrious hunt, fell in with a pheasant or rabbit, it was appropriated by his master, in order to be conveyed to his patroness's soup pot.

The party also made several visits to Dame Hedwig's charming little abode beside the limpid stream. The dame, we may be assured, was always well pleased to receive them; and if they did not see Henga, they always heard of him, and of his wonderful doings and sayings; yea, verily, *sayings*, for by the dame's account he was particularly loquacious, and “very good company.” Once, too, they heard the hidden

musician, which Hans averred, but nobody believed, to be a *bird!* Bulfinch!

Their very first visit was made to Hilda's cave, as more than one reason pointed to the Hermit as a most desirable and sorely-needed adviser; but, alas, the good man was not to be found therein. The inner apartment was closed, but the chapel still remained open.

Here they found a poor old woman, come, she said, "to beseech St. Hilda to send back her servant, the good Hermit, who, to the grief and consternation of the whole district, had not been seen or heard of for many days; and no one knew whither he was gone or in what direction to seek him. The disappearance of the venerable man, coupled with the absence of the Leech, and the mystery that hung over the fate of Inna, assumed an appearance of design; and in spite of Blandina's efforts, or the reviving influences of air and exercise, still banished the rose from the cheek of the Princess, and peace from her spirit.

"I would that the Court were returned," she said one evening to her only confidante, after another and ineffectual attempt to find the Hermit Celestine. "It is not that I am tired of our solitude, but I feel outward repose brings no rest to a troubled mind. I feel, too, the quiet around me is like the stifling calm that precedes a thunder-storm. There are signs all around of a coming tempest, and I shall not breathe freely until it is braved and past, whatever may be the result."

And Bertha's wish was soon fulfilled.

On the following day, the Court returned from their lake to their mountain castle, and the reunion was a happy one. For a few brief hours every troubled spirit seemed to forget its secret grief in the sociability and repose of the family circle, and a return to one who was an object of special love, admiration, and interest to all, and whose sweet eyes and voice gave them a radiant welcome.

De Courcy, and the gentle Minstrel were admitted within the close-drawn circle, from which the future and its threatening ills were banished. Alas, but briefly; for the pale

countenance of the Archduke assumed its suffering expression; his lip quivered and his hand trembled as he took leave of his daughter at night, expressing a wish for a private interview with her on the morrow; and the hour agreed on was that following the morning meal.

There are few things so much to be deprecated in a work of fiction as long dissertations and explanations descriptive of the feelings and forebodings, present and prospective, of the actors. It is little complimentary either to author or reader, implying that the one has failed in making his meaning plain, or that the other has not intelligence to discern it. We will therefore pass over the conflicts endured by our poor heroine on the sleepless night that preceded this momentous and long-dreaded interview, and endeavour to describe what passed between the father and daughter during its continuance.

Deceived by the bright carmine with which the long-desired yet equally-dreaded meeting had flushed her cheeks, the father expressed his delight at his daughter's improved looks; and, as he embraced and took his seat by her side, said, with an effort at cheerfulness, belied by the deep accompanying sigh,—

“Why, my Bertha, I thought thou didst plead sickness and weariness for not joining our ride to Neu Hapsburg. Go to! thou art a little lazy dissembler, for I never beheld thee look brighter than I see thee now, unless—” and here his voice lost its tone of gladness—“it was on the first day of my return from captivity.”

“And is it not the sun, my father, which brightens up and gives colour to the flower?”

“My sun is nearly set, Bertha: thou must learn to live and bloom without it. Nay, weep not, my dutous child, thou, and my poor afflicted consort are all I shall find wanting in the dark house to which I must now return, soon to exchange it for one more narrow. Thou wilt, I know, be kind to her in her blind estate.”

Bertha strove to reply, strove to ask an explanation of these

melancholy requirements, of which the foreshadowings filled her with anguish ; but tears and sobs choked her utterance, and the Duke went on,—

“ My beloved child, I have too long given way to the delusive hope that our final parting might be spared ; but my time of grace is nearly expired, and hope has died out too. Listen, my Bertha,” and he tenderly wiped off her tears as he continued, “ I will endeavour to explain the difficulties that hedge me round—the impediments also which yet lie between the fulfilment of an engagement in which my honour—and do I err, my child, in believing your heart to be concerned ? ”

The bright blush which overspread his daughter’s lovely countenance, the beam of her still tearful eyes were too well understood by her father, who sighed from the depth of his lacerated heart, yet replied calmly,—

“ I am ready for any sacrifice, even to that of giving thee up, since I see it is thy choice.”

“ But why talk of *sacrifice*, my father, or even of separation ? Can you not, will you not, share your daughter’s home ? ”

“ Thou forgettest my chains, Bertha, and my pledged word to the Emperor—the generous friend who relied on my promise of return to my prison, if thy uncles refuse to comply with his reasonable, yea, merciful, stipulations ; and, if thou—”

He stopped ; the affectionate feelings of the father triumphed over every sterner necessity ; the natural love of freedom, even the risk of life, was overcome. He could not dim his child’s too evident happiness by telling her of his brothers’ opposition to it. He could not bid her renounce the husband of her preference, and of his own choice, for another, even although all that was valuable to him in life hung on the exchange. His hesitation was noticed by Bertha, and her fears roused.

“ And will not my uncles consent to so small a sacrifice, to secure so great a boon ? ”

“ Perhaps they deem not of either as thou dost, love. Thy father is of small account now in the eyes of his brethren.

Sorrow has weakened, disappointment has clouded him ; evil destiny has marred all his hopes, and the key of his prison-door will soon be turned on all but *one*, who will be no unwelcome visitor to him on whose head cruel frosts fell even in his summer days. Weep not ; oh, weep not thus, my child !”

But she *did* weep, until there came across her brow the expression of an anguish too deep for tears.

“ If my father withhold his blessing,” she said, as she knelt before him, “ I am ready to renounce Prince John, and to know no duty beyond that of a daughter.”

“ I do not, my dutious child. Rise, and thou shalt hear that I have even now renewed my early promise to him. When repeated strokes of adverse fortune threw me, a lost man, into the power of Louis of Bavaria—when all my allies forgot, or remembered only to insult their fallen friend—when the crown had been snatched from my head, and a throne had been tendered to him, how could I refuse his generous offer to fulfil an engagement made under such different circumstances ? Your anxious looks ask for an explanation, which I scarcely know how to give. My acceptance of the Prince’s proposals hung on the contingency of my brethren’s approval, and your consent to leave me alone to—But thou art ill, Bertha,” continued the Duke, alarmed at the paleness which suddenly overspread her countenance; “ thy cheeks are pale, thy forehead burns, thy hands are icy cold ! What, ho, Blandina ! Haste for restoratives, and help me to lay thy lady on her couch !”

This they did with united tenderness, whilst the poor half-panting girl entreated them not to be alarmed, as the sudden chilliness that had come over her was passing away.

The anxious father, however, left her to hasten the departure of a messenger to summon the Leech, leaving his daughter to the soothing care of her judicious nurse.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TWO WITNESSES.

“ What! silent all? Has Justice, then, no voice?
Has Innocence no friend? ”

AFTER waiting what to him appeared a sufficient time for the return of his messenger, the Archduke went out on the ramparts to watch for his appearance, and gain the earliest intelligence of his mission. He had paced to and fro many times, stopping at each turn to look over the road by which he must approach the Castle, when he joyfully hailed a speck in the distance; and concluding it must either be the Leech, or the messenger sent to summon him, he left the ramparts, descended to the postern gate, and passed through it into the road beyond.

The advancing and expanding speck, however, was evidently neither the Doctor nor the serving-man; but to what section of the animal kingdom it belonged baffled conjecture. Had the locality been in Arabia Deserta, the guesser would probably, from its long legs and wing-like appendixes, as well as its half-flying, half-running motion, have pronounced it to have been an ostrich; had he lived in these days, he might have been still more inclined to deem it a gorilla; and perhaps neither would have more startled him than discovering in the strange flushed being who approached him no other than poor Henga!

His momentum was so irresistible that, as the Duke caught him as he passed, by the arm, he was drawn on some paces before he could stop the fugitive to demand what he was in search of?

“ The Princess Bertha. Father Swithin has bid me speak with her.”

“ She is sick, boy,” replied the Duke; “ and if thou hast

any regard for her, go, I pray thee, and bring the Leech hither."

"Ay, verily, for that is the errand I came on; but thou must seek him with me. Follow me!"

As the boy uttered this invitation, he turned round and set off as speedily as he had arrived. To follow on foot with any hope of overtaking was out of the question; fortunately, the messenger sent to summon the Leech returned at this moment to report his unsuccessful search.

"Mount again, and ride after yon runaway," was the Duke's first command; but recollecting Henga's wayward humour would be better soothed by his address, and feeling a strong suspicion regarding the Leech's mysterious absence, he mounted the groom's horse, and rode himself after the fugitive.

Henga, however, slackened not his pace, nor took any further notice of his noble follower than by occasionally turning his head and beckoning him onward. The singular chase relaxed not until, within a short distance of the Abbey gate, they met Father Swithin, who with joyful surprise advanced to meet the Prince, exclaiming as he made his respectful obeisance,—

"St. Esculapius be magnified! The innocent will be cleared, and the good Leech will be set at liberty."

"Cleared! at liberty! Speak, good father. What has happened?"

"Oh, my Prince, that just man, whose blessed work was to save the lives of his suffering fellow-creatures, has been taken up, and thrown into the Abbey dungeons, on a lying charge of murder."

"Monstrous! Explain," gasped the Duke.

"'Tis naught but a devilish plot (St. Dunstan forgive me!) to ruin the guiltless, and to bring discredit on the most sovereign remedy that ever human brains concocted or human hands commingled—a mixture of such powerful aroma that the famous Abbot and Saint, Galen—"

A gesture of impatience from his tortured listener brought

up the good father from the depths of hagiology, both pagan and popish, to the tame levels of common sense.

“Be it known, then,” he continued, “to your Highness, that the new Prior—woe worth the day he came hither!—with Father Anselmo and the Herr Superintendent, medical, and magisterial, of the Brugg hospital, have falsely and most diabolically affirmed (St. Rhadamanthus requite on their own heads the iniquitous judgment, and assoil me thus to speak of dignitaries!)—yea, affirmed that our good Leech has poisoned a damsel committed to his healing operations; she being no other than the once favoured waiting-woman of our well-beloved Princess, the Lady Bertha. And, yet more monstrous, they declare the foul deed to have been perpetrated through the agency of the renowned Elixir known throughout all Christendom by the title of the Quinte Essenze, a liquid which—”

“The Quinte Essenze?” eagerly interrupted the Duke. “Meanest thou that dainty compound brought by Henga some while ago to be distilled by the Hermit Celestine?”

“The very same; and much difficulty had the lad to find the components thereof, seeing that the five reptiles of which it is concocted are of retired habits, and—”

“All which we will talk of at a more convenient season. It is enough that the mixture brought by Henga was that placed in the Hermit’s alembic.”

“To that I can testify. But, your Highness, we must not betray the aged and the Heaven-stricken.”

“That may Heaven forbid! But lend me thy cloak, good father; conduct me by a private door into the justice hall, and we may yet justify the innocent.”

“And may every saint and martyr in the calendar assist in the blessed work!” said the pious old man. “I have a witness who would help also; but all who would testify for the accused have been denied entrance, and sent rudely from the gate.”

During this parley, the travesty was being accomplished beneath a portico leading to the gloomy building. Father

Swithin's cloak was somewhat deficient in length, but it was of ample dimensions, and the cowl concealed the features of the noble borrower: moreover, the private door (of which Swithin possessed a key, on account of its leading through a dark passage to some vacant chambers he had been permitted to store his fruits in) was immediately behind the seats of the judge and council. In this obscure retreat, whilst entirely hidden from observation, the Duke perceived he should be in the most favourable condition to watch the proceedings in the hall. Therefore, cautioning Father Swithin to secrecy, he bade him lock the door of this private entrance, and leave him alone in the passage to which it led. The gloomy hall beyond was less obscure, but was not the less adapted to the scenes enacted within—of judgment perverted by hatred or self-interest, of perjury and wrong triumphing over truth, and of innocence condemned to hopeless imprisonment, and even death: for Koenigsfelden being a royal abbey, the community exercised absolute power over the unfortunate beings arraigned before its tribunal.

The dreary building was unoccupied at the Duke's entrance, unless by a few hangers-on of the convent, who had crept in under favour of its obscurity. It was lighted, if such a term could be applied to its misty dimness, by one window situated at the end of the large low hall occupied by the throne and seats of the president and his assistant judges; and so placed that its light should fall on the unhappy prisoner who stood before them. With the exception of those mentioned, the building contained no seats, evidencing that spectators and listeners formed no part of that ecclesiastic tribunal.

After remaining a short time in darkness and silence, the Duke heard the convent-bell strike the hour of noon, and immediately after a pacing of measured but muffled footsteps crossed the court. The procession then entered the hall, making its circle round it, and depositing in its progress with admirable precision each member in his allotted place. First walked the younger portion of the *Dram-pers* boys, carrying the banners of St. Francis and other canonized worthies; then

walked the accused, the humane Dr. Baumgarten, without a cloud on his serene brow ; and after him came the witnesses, their eyes fixed on the ground, as if they feared to meet the glance of the many to whom the innocence of the Leech was as dear as his preservation was important. The lay brothers followed next, poor Father Swithin's tottering steps and flushed countenance betraying his emotion ; and at length, after the choir brothers, came the culminating point of the artfully-arranged representation—the majestic form of the Prior, not in the squalor of the saint, but in full magisterial robes, supported on either side by a well-chosen foil, in his assistant-judges.

The portrait of Father Anselmo, who was well termed the Accuser, we have already sketched ; that of the other judge, nominally the Defender, was equally calculated in its bloated vacuity for the exhibition of an effective contrast. But even without these artificial aids the commanding figure, the faultless features, the piercing eye, the intellectual forehead of the ex-inquisitor, the expression of power and resolution in his every movement, would have filled the most hopeful of the spectators with apprehensions for the object of his persecution.

When the almost noiseless march had ceased, and each was fixed in his allotted station, the Accuser, Father Anselmo, opened the trial, and in his harsh and edgy accents, rising occasionally into a husky scream, called on the Leech Baumgarten to answer to the two charges laid against him by the Superintendent of the hospital at Brugg, of mortal import, namely :—

Imprimis, The unlawfully concocting a certain poisonous liquid *falsely* called the Quinte Essenze, it being no other than a compound of the slime and skins of noxious reptiles, brought together by the enchantments of the Evil One, with the intent of taking away the life of one Inna Schmidt, tresswoman to her Highness the Princess Bertha ; and,

Secundo, For unlawfully removing the aforesaid Inna Schmidt from the Castle of Hapsburg, she being then under

the influence of his poison, and conveying her to the hospital of Brugg, where, in the absence of the Herr Superintendent, he, the prisoner, had succeeded in administering more of the said devil-concocted poison, and causing her immediate death.

We cannot attempt to follow this mock trial through all its tedious details, and in the phraseology of a mediæval court.

Passing over the glaring perjuries of Inna's suborned nurse, and the inconsistent depositions of some of the hospital menials, we will notice that of the Superintendent of the Brugg hospital, who gave his evidence with apparent reluctance, awed, it should seem, by the eye of the Prior, which was fixed on him.

He deposed to the admission of Inna, and her gradual improvement in health under his care, until, on his return from a short absence, he learnt from her nurse and other attendants, whose evidence was already before the Court, that she had suddenly sickened, and died in such a state of disease as to render it necessary for them to commit her body to the earth before his return.

The evidence for the prosecution ended, the prisoner was haughtily asked what he had to plead in his defence.

“To deny *in toto* the charges brought against me,” he calmly yet firmly replied. “As to the first charge: the elixir of the Quinte Essenze, be it even, as disrespectfully averred, *poison*, or—as I honestly believe, and procured to use as such—its most sovereign *antidote*”—and the stress he laid on the last word was not unnoticed by his accusers—“whether, I repeat, its virtues are recognized or suspected, it matters little, since not one drop of the mixture ever reached my patient's lips; the retort in which the valuable ingredients were placed for distillation having exploded during the process, and the liquid been spilt.”

A disdainful smile curled the lip of the President, whilst the Accuser demanded of the prisoner, “if he had any witnesses to prove this his improbable assertion?”

“None to whom you will allow a hearing,” was the undaunted reply.

“Then my duty is fulfilled, and my Lord Judge will give his sentence accordingly.”

“Stop, my lord!” interrupted the presumed Defender of the accused, with a pretended, and no doubt preconcerted, show of justice. “I am here to plead the cause of the prisoner; let me therefore implore you graciously to allow a few moments’ pause; if, mayhap, some witness may yet appear in his behalf.”

“So be it.”

And then, after a short interval of profound silence, the Judge arose, and looking round on the awed assembly, said solemnly,—

“I solemnly adjure any one present who can testify to the innocence of the accused, in the name of God, and of Holy Mother Church, to come forward!”

The echo of the deep full-toned voice died on the walls of the vast hall, amid a silence broken by no other sound; when the strained ear caught that of a measured footstep approaching from another direction; and the eager eye discerned a tall figure moving slowly forward towards the judges’ seats. Arrived in front of them, he paused for a short time, deliberately lifted the cowl that concealed his countenance, and threw off his disguise—discovering, to his dismayed summoners, in the witness they had so imprudently called for, the august person of the Archduke Frederick!

“My Lord Judge,” he said, with stern dignity, “you have demanded a witness to Herr Baumgarten’s innocence. Behold your Prince!”

Then, after a short pause, to allow the excitement which so sudden an apparition had occasioned, not only to the iniquitous judges, but the whole assembly, he continued:—

“I am here for the purpose of vindicating the innocence of a righteous man, and demand a respectful hearing of the circumstances which led to a personal and undeniable evidence thereof. Having been led, as I now believe, by the hand of God to visit St. Hilda’s cave some two weeks since, I found the Hermit Celestine engaged in the distillery of

that well-known elixir and long-tried *antidote*, the Quinte Essenze. Here, whilst awaiting Father Celestine's leisure, and hidden from his sight by the fumes of the boiling ingredients, I watched the process of his work until it was unfortunately marred by the bursting of the alembic, and the wasting of its contents. Yet, why call I it unfortunate, since the accident proves without doubt the innocence of the accused?"

"It is enough," said the Judge, his words being more vehemently echoed by his trembling co-officials; "your Highness's evidence is conclusive. The Herr Baumgarten stands acquitted thereby."

"Stop!" said the Archduke authoritatively. "The Herr Baumgarten shall go hence only in virtue of his own innocence. I have proved him free of the lesser charge, and am prepared as triumphantly to meet that of having caused the death of Inna Schmidt in the Brugg hospital. Let an official be sent to unbar the great gate, and let Father Swithin be despatched with him, to conduct hither certain persons standing without, vainly demanding an entrance."

A few minutes of agitation to all, of torture to some, passed in profound silence, when Father Swithin returned, tremulous with delight, his eye glistening through tears of joy, leading in a young woman, whose deepening blushes evidenced to her being the real, live *Inna*, and not a spectre risen from the grave; poisoned by one party and prematurely buried by another. A murmur of astonishment crept round the cold hall, and one or two, more courageous than the rest, ventured, under the shelter of royal patronage, to tender their congratulations to the emancipated prisoner.

His benevolent liberator warmly greeted the Leech, and checked his expressions of gratitude.

"I came to ask *your* services for my sick daughter," he said. "Leave your thanks for a season of more leisure, and let us hasten to her; Inna must come too."

"And the sight of her poor tire-woman, restored to health, will do *her* Highness more good than the whole *Pharmacoepia*."

“Bating the renowned Quinte Essenze, doctor.” The Archduke said this with a cheerful smile, which disappeared as he turned towards the Prior and histrembling associates, and said—“I cannot quit this court, falsely called of justice, without stating my intention of expressing to my Lord Abbot, on his return, my high displeasure at the manner in which his deputies have fulfilled their trust. For you, Herr Sperintendent, I shall take judgment into my own hands, by dismissing you from a situation which you have proved yourself incompetent to fill ; and giving it to an abler and better director.”

The poor man threw himself almost frantically at the feet of the Prince, whilst Dr. Baumgarten entreated him to defer his sentence until he had graciously considered some exculpatory circumstances which he himself would bring before him. This the generous rival did on their ride towards Hapsburg, and wrung a promise from the Duke that he would pardon, though he could never more respect, the weak dupe of such atrocious villainy.

The plea urged by Baumgarten in exculpation we will give in his own words :—

“When, contrary to my advice, Inna was removed to the hospital at Brugg, and left entirely in the power of her wicked nurse, and still more culpable employers—although, through extreme watchfulness I had succeeded in preventing any foul doings, and she was then almost restored to health—I doubted the ability of the Superintendent to guard against the wicked machinations of her subtle enemies. I therefore thought it right to use precautions for her safety and to furnish her with a powerful *antidote* to such. Your Highness knows full well the fate of the elixir which I knew would prove such. When I heard of its destruction, I had nearly given up all hope of the poor girl’s preservation. This, however, was watched over by a higher hand, who ordered the following circumstances, which I eagerly embraced, for her deliverance. It was fortunate that at this time the Superintendent was called to a distant patient, a man of station, whose danger was imminent; it was equally so that the Abbot had not departed on his

annual visitation, and that I obtained his permission to occupy the Superintendent's place until his return. I found Inna again drooping, and I determined to use the opportunity, thus providentially placed in my power, to remove her from the hospital. I need not weary your Highness with a detail of all *our*—for Father Swithin was my efficient helper throughout—little contrivances to elude the nurse and effect our purpose. I will only add that Inna had a lover, a clever and estimable youth, at whose mother's house she was kindly received; and that her berth was filled by a patient about her own age then in an advanced stage of putrid fever. The poor girl died that night, and the statement of her speedy interment was correct."

" You acquit the Superintendent, then, of direct falsehood?"

" I do; nay more, I think even the nurse believed the buried woman to have been Inna. Whether her own conscience whispered the cause, or the alarming accounts I gave of the infectious nature of the disease kept her from the pretended Inna's room I know not, but she was easily kept from entering it, and declined performing the usual offices for the dead."

" Dr. Baumgarten" said the Prince, suddenly drawing in his own bridle and laying his hand on that of his companion, " explain to me a mystery I cannot fathom: how comes it that the life of that obscure maiden is of such import as to warrant the risk and guilt that have been incurred to get rid of it?"

" Inna had become—through her own imprudence, I grieve to say—possessed of a secret which it was of consequence to the honour of the Church, and especially to some of her highest functionaries of the Abbey, to conceal: moreover, she was the Princess's tire-woman."

" Ha! I must hear more of this in a fitting time and place; at present we must hasten to my daughter." The anxious father gave the rein to his gallant steed, and they were soon at the Castle gates.

The Leech was right: the restoration of her penitent and almost hopelessly-lost Inna, did the Princess all the good he

had expected; and, with the unselfish benevolence of her nature, she laid aside her own cares and sorrows to listen to the tale of poor Inna's sufferings, related with such a sense of their having been merited, and so many tears of penitence, that Blandina forgot the little homily on the sins of falsehood and levity which she had intended to deliver, feeling that the poor culprit had been sufficiently punished for them.

The future prospect of the restored favourite and her faithful betrothed was a subject of general interest; and, whilst Gertruda and Blandina plied their needles in the fabrication of the *trousseau*, Bertha consulted with her uncle, the Archduke Albert, on the furnishing and stocking of the little farm he had kindly allotted to them for their future residence. When the wedding-day arrived, Swithin and Henga were early with their offerings; the august Abbess sent the gift of a gilt crucifix, permitting her nuns to add cakes and sweetmeats for the feast. The three Princesses attended the marriage ceremony, and the good Docter gave away the bride.

Thus this little episode seemed for awhile to chase care and sorrow from the generous hearts that sympathized so warmly in the interests of the humble heroine.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LE CHÂTEAU D'AMOUR.

“Château d'Amour, te veux tu pas rendre,
Veux tu te rendre, ou tenir bon ?”

CONSERVATEUR SUISSE.

THE next event of note in our history was a more august betrothal—that of the Princess Alice and the Earl de Courcy; a ceremony of so much importance and display that we would fain have entered on a minute description thereof. But, alack ! even the Magician of the North, had he lived in these recent days, must have broken his wand in despair of ever reviving scenes so glaring, so majestic, so wonderful, as those daily passing before the almost satiated eye of the millions of our time.

Moreover, our writers of romantic history, our chroniclers of Queens and Princesses, have so exhausted the theme of fêtes and tournaments, pomps and processions, that we should have allowed the ceremony of the betrothal in question to have passed without illustration, had it not been celebrated by the enactment of a graceful and national Swiss fête, termed “Le Château d'Amour,” which possesses the rare charm of novelty.

At an early hour of the day of its celebration, and that following the day of the betrothal of the young lovers, a *Gymnocrasis*, consisting of all the female rank, matrons and maids, of the neighbourhood, assembled in the Archduchess's apartments, for the purpose of electing a “Queen of Beauty” to take the command of the Château d'Amour, which, so it was confidently affirmed, was that day to be attacked by a formidable battalion of knights and squires; with the most perfidious and unwarrantable design of battering down the Castle itself, and carrying off its defenders.

The fair assembly comported themselves with proper dignity,

and discussed the business in hand with a gravity due to its exigence and importance.

After a careful register of votes, it was found that the throne was awarded to the Princess Alice, who, whilst pleased at her election, modestly declined the pre-eminence in favour of the superior claims of Bertha and Gertruda—claims which the electresses themselves might have allowed, but for the radiant charm of happiness which animated the whole being of the lovely heroine of the day.

The election now made, it was ratified by the investiture of the insignia of royalty—namely, a crown of roses, and a sceptre of myrtle-boughs; and in return she presented to each of her fair subjects a *flower*, which they received on one knee, engaging at the same time to defend the precious distinction even with their lives.

These interesting preliminaries settled, the new-made Queen and her maiden train—their path strewn with flowers, whilst attendant minstrels sang the legend of the Castle of Love, and the praises of its defenders—led the way to an open space in the forest.

Here arose a castle, built, it is true, of wood, but on the approved plan of a regular fortress, with donjon keep and outer fortifications. It was, moreover, profusely ornamented with emblems and ciphers, suited to its designation and defenders, and waggon-loads of suitable ammunitions were laid in for the warfare—harmless in themselves, but sometimes thrown with deadly aim—such as bouquets of flowers, gloves, fans, perfumes, and, for cases of extremity, boughs of fragrant shrubs.

On the outside of this fairy structure was ranged an amphitheatre of seats for the spectators of the drama, including the royal party and the *élite* of the neighbouring nobles and gentles; who, already assembled, rose as the Queen and her train passed through their centre to take their places on the ramparts—we must not say to *man* them.

The valiant defenders were habited as individual taste directed, their considerate Queen having declined any inter-

ference with the costume of her volunteer supporters, save and except in the standing order that the magic flower, already alluded to, must be worn uniformly by each on the left side, tied by a knot of green ribbon.

The ladies had scarcely reached their destination, or had time to take a survey of the strength of their fortifications, ere the sound of martial music was heard; and soon a line of young cavaliers was discerned winding through the narrow forest-paths, habited in rich and somewhat fanciful array and unarmed; they passed by the assembled spectators, bowing courteously and deferentially, and advanced to the closed gates of the Château d'Amour.

Here they formed in line, and, falling each on one knee, made a low obeisance to the Queen of Beauty and her adherents, which was graciously returned, amid the plaudits of the spectators.

A few preluding notes from the trumpet having restored silence, the leader of the knightly band, who, of course, was Erin's belted Earl de Courcy, advanced a few steps in front, and solicited an audience. In a fair and flattering address, he humbly solicited an entrance for himself and fellow-knights into the Château d'Amour, pleading in moving tones "the distance they had travelled, the pains they had endured, and the services they were prepared to render."

To this appeal, which was heard with much indulgence, the Queen of Beauty replied in such silver tones as "the listeners held their breath to hear,"—

"That the only service she and her subjects required or would accept was, that the Knight should lead off his chivalry from their walls—that it was their intention to set up an independent kingdom, from which she trusted the Knights would keep themselves, and all the like intruders aloof; and allow them to govern it as seemed best to themselves."

Hereupon there arose a murmur of disapprobation amongst the assailants, and one more indignant than the rest declared, "that sooner would he patiently submit to be deprived of the light of the sun and the breath of day than the presence of

those fair beings who gave light and life to his existence; that though the respect they owed to the Queen of Beauty and her compeers was such that they were ready to kneel at their footstool, yet the threatened deprivation had so driven him to despair, that he should feel obligated to propose to his miserable fellow-exiles, if all entreaties failed, that they should enter the Castle by force, and, like the Romans of old, carry away each one a captive from the cruel and rebellious community."

This speech was received very differently by the auditors; one half crying "Shame!" the other, perhaps from their better appreciation of the classical allusion, "Brava!" All parties, however, warmly agreed in applauding the courageous Queen, and could scarcely contain the desire of enlisting in her defence—when she declared herself and followers ready to defend their independence, and ordered a battle-charge to be instantly sounded.

Alas, alas, the boast was all too confident! The assailants rushed to the attack, and, though unarmed, the weak barriers gave way beneath their powerful onslaught, and they soon gained an entrance into the court of the Castle. Here they were encountered by volleys of bouquets and branches, and such ammunition as we have enumerated, fired with undaunted courage and unerring aim by the intrepid Amazons on the ramparts; yet all in vain! Nearer and nearer the treacherous foe advances, the painted barricades crackling beneath their footsteps; until, the floral ammunition exhausted and the enemy nearly on their ramparts, the panting and exhausted garrison perceived they had no alternative but to surrender and make the best terms they could with their conquerors. Accordingly, detaching the white scarf which bound her waist, the Queen of Beauty bade an attendant herald affix it to the Castle tower, and demand a truce.

The signal of peace was most courteously hailed by the cavalier band, who pressed their right hands on their hearts, and bowed a graceful assent as they retired to their former position on the outside of the now shattered walls of the

Château d'Amour; the minstrels accompanying the movement by strains of the softest music, which died away in silence at the commencement of another act of the drama.

This began by a protestation of amity and devotion, made by the leader in his own name and that of his companions, together with the rehearsal of the terms of capitulation for the conquered garrison. These, the Queen and her subjects alike indignantly rejected, declaring they would never consent to a surrender which might peril their freedom of action, and demanded to be allowed to march out with the honours of war, that they might go elsewhere and found another independent settlement. There were evident signs of mutiny at this proposal; but De Courcy, enforcing patience and forbearance, another half-hour was pleasantly spent in the endeavour, as it should seem, on the one side to gain an unconditional release, and on the other to make the most of victory. At length, as some of his adherents began to exhibit symptoms of taking the management into their own hands, their leader, after a short consultation, informed the obstinate Amazons that he advanced for the last time to propose the most indulgent terms ever offered to a captived enemy; warning them if they did not receive them, he could no longer defend them from the consequence of their contumacy. These terms, which the Queen and all her ladies declared that nothing but stern necessity would induce them to listen to, were, that each Knight in the conquering army should be allowed to enter the Château d'Amour according to his rank, and to select from thence one of the subjects of the Queen of Beauty, who was *herself* to be the prize of their leader. It was moreover stipulated (and this was declared to be the most rigorous article of the capitulation), that each fair captive should surrender as a ransom the token flower she wore in her bosom, allowing her captor to kiss the fair hand that presented it: and furthermore, that the happy possessor of the said flower was thereby qualified as attendant cavalier at the ball and banquet.

The Queen signified her acceptance of these terms by giving

her hand and bouquet to the triumphant Ambassador, and leading the long file of young couples who left their dilapidated Castle to bend their steps to the banqueting hall of Hapsburg, followed by the applauding spectators and accompanied by the minstrel band.

The programme was perfect, and so happily acted out that each one seemed to have the partner he would have selected had choice, not war, decided. Indeed, so exactly was every part adjusted that there was a whisper of pre-arrangement between some of the subjects of the Queen of Beauty and their assailants ; but, utterly repudiating such a malicious insinuation, we simply record the universal content. Even when the united pair looked anxious ; where the knight betrayed more earnestness than mirth ; when bright eyes were bent on the ground, and even suffused with tears,—there seemed no inclination on either side to part. One such couple we would especially notice, who, evidencing by their dejection and earnestness many of the features of true love, showed as plainly that its current did not run smooth. If the knight's colour was heightened and his eyes fixed on his companion, her cheeks were deadly pale, and her eyes cast down.

“ You are, then,” he said, “ determined to take a step which desolates me ? Cruel, cruel maiden ! If I perish—and I swear to thee I will return to the battle-field, and bare my breast to the first weapon that is pointed at it—*thou* wilt have to answer for the deed.”

“ You do not judge righteously,” replied a low sweet voice. “ If you rush on self-destruction, I shall have no more to answer for it than I have for your blind headlong passion. You must remember that at the first word of love—it was at the Archduchess's ball—I undeceived you as to my assumed character.”

“ I know it well ; but as soon might you attempt to extinguish a flame by the soft breath of the perfumed gale of eve—Besides, it was all too late. From the moment I knelt before you in my minstrel guise, and you hung round my neck this precious chain, which shall never be disengaged from it, my

heart vowed its eternal allegiance. Why did you wear that fatal disguise?"

"I feel now it was wrong, even for one moment and on whatever pretence, to doff the holy garb; yet it could deceive you but for one short moment; at the very next interview I told you of my vows, and forewarned you that I held them to be indissoluble—nay, more, when you still urged your suit, I imparted the fatal secret of my birth and that of the tie which bound me to Koenigsfelden."

"All but as the withe-band before the force of true love. Oh, Gertruda, consent to fly with me! The proudest of my race will own and protect thee; first for mine, and then for thine own unrivalled self."

Gertruda smiled mournfully, "And my vows?"

"They are not indissoluble; those of probation are as yet only on you; and I swear to thee, my first, my only love, that if thou wilt consent to be mine, I will incur the penalty of sacrilege, and tear thee from the altar ere they force thee to pronounce those that would separate us for ever. Oh, come to me this night on the terrace, and we will—"

Gertruda interrupted her ardent lover. "And were I," she said mournfully, "thus far to forget my maiden decorum, wouldst thou not remind me of it, and send me back to better thoughts? No, no;" and here a smile of conscious rectitude beamed through her sadness. "Thou must have a consort worthy of thy high deserts, and thou wilt be rewarded with such for the victory over thy vain desires, and thy patience in contradiction."

"Ay, thou mayest talk of patience who knowest not what love or preference is. It is of little import to *thee* to give up what thou dost not value;" and the beautiful lips which uttered these bitter words curled in scorn.

"Not value?" said the suffering girl raising her tear-dimmed eyes as if in appeal to Heaven, and forgetting in this moment of trial the reserve she had hitherto most conscientiously imposed on herself,—"not value? then were I the most ungrateful wretch alive. No sacrifice, sayest thou, to

give up one so generous, so disinterested—to bid adieu to life, when for the first time it offers its most alluring temptations, its most precious gifts?"

She stopped, and blushed deeply at the confession her words conveyed. Her lover caught at it with rapture.

"You do not, then, hate me; you do not scorn the devotion of one so unworthy?"

"Let not your impatience do me this wrong." Then, touched by his grief, and from the artless sincerity of her character, she added, "Will it soften the stern necessity of my rejection of a suit so noble to own (and in so doing may the Blessed Virgin pray for me if I depart from the decorum of my estate!) that were I free from my religious vows, were I your equal—nay, were I queen of the fairest heritage of earth, I would—"

Here the delighted gaze of the enraptured Bard, and the consciousness of having betrayed too much, made her hesitate and leave him to finish the sentence, which he did by a thousand thanks and protestations, and yet more passionate entreaties that she would not pronounce the hated vow until he had laid their difficulties before the friend to whom he understood she had promised to apply to in her straits, and who he well knew had power as well as ability to be of service."

The latter part of de Lauffenburg's speech was unintelligible to Gertruda; but time was too precious to admit of explanation, and she would use it to console and fortify.

"I have applied to no friend," she said, "but One who admits no sacrifice to inclination, no compromise with duty. I have asked no consolation but from Him who will abundantly reward us for all we give up for His sake. Oh, de Lauffenburg, let this hope sustain us both!"

They had now arrived at the gate of the Castle, where the Queen of Beauty stood to receive the homage of her subjects, ere she led the way to the banquet.

It was a relief to Gertruda that during that, and the ball which followed, the Abbot never relaxed in his watchful guardianship; for she feared her lover's importunities, and,

like all the truly strong, mistrusted her own powers of resistance.

It was in vain that poor de Lauffenburg, who, by the laws of the Château d'Amour, laid claim to the privilege, so highly prized, of acting as her attendant cavalier, frowned and answered the bland propositions of the accomplished politician with laconic abruptness ; it neither disturbed his equanimity nor relaxed his watchfulness. His penetration had discerned how matters stood between the young pair, and his heart had done justice to the noble self-denial of Gertruda : and if long habit had not stifled its dictates, would have yearned to make them happy.

Whether it was that, thus watched and prevented from expressing feelings with which his heart was overcharged, the Bard felt an impetuous desire to give them vent in song ; or that he sought the only way in which he could communicate with her he loved, and warn her of the fate that awaited her obduracy ;—but after the banquet, and just as the assembly was about to break up, de Lauffenburg complied, most unexpectedly, with a request conveyed to him in the name of the Archduchess, and eagerly seconded by all present, to allow his harp to be brought, and again to enchant them with his divine art. He begged first to be allowed to string and tune it in his own apartment, and after a short absence returned clad in the minstrel dress he wore on the first evening of his appearance at the Castle. How changed in all beside ! But, if then he was a bright personification of the *joyeuse science*, radiant in youth, glowing with genius—yet now, even in his pallor and dejection, there was a deeper fervour in his eye, a more heaven-breathing inspiration in his whole being.

Absorbed by one idea, totally abstracted from all consciousness of the gazing, listening throng around, he struck the first chords of his harp—low, murmuring notes, gradually swelling, until the tones of his voice, at first almost imperceptibly, mingled with them in a low, solemn strain, of which the following may convey some faint idea :—

THE DIRGE.

At a shrine in convent garden,
 A fair young maiden prayed,
 Where moonbeams through the leafless boughs
 A flickering carpet made.
 Her voice is as the night breeze low,
 And o'er her pallid cheek the tear-drops flow.

“Father!” she cries, “whose watchful eye
 Beholds the sparrow’s fall,
 Whose ear is open and attent
 To the young raven’s call—
 Oh, pity, then, the sad estate
 Of one more weak than they—more desolate!

“Thou knowest, Thou alone canst know
 The struggle of the soul
 That would each memory repress,
 Each wand’ring thought control.
 Thou know’st my weariness and woe,
 My longing hope of rest, denied below!

“I do not murmur—still resigned,
 I wait on Thy behest;
 But, oh, that Thou would’st take me where
 The weary are at rest!
 Would’st call me to Thy world above,
 Where I may freely breathe, and sinless love.”

Her prayer is heard, her ransomed soul
 Has soared on seraph’s wing—
 Whilst the soft moon her night-watch keeps,
 The winds her requiem sing;
 And fast adown the snow-flakes fall,
 Wrapping her lifeless form in fleecy pall.

* * * * *

There’s a stir in the convent’s calm,
 An echo from its walls
 Of tread of swift and searching feet,
 Of loud and anxious calls,
 As they seek her in choir and cell,
 And fling on the night wind the passing bell.

The snow falls fast, the moon has set,
 But, by the torches’ glare,
 They gain at length the shrine, and find
 The lost one slumb’ring there:
 And with low chant and measured tread,
 They bear to the cloisters the holy dead.

Here, mingling with the organ's peal
 And sob of minute bell,
Sweet voices of the sister band
 In solemn requiem swell;
As they lay her in the tomb apart,
And weep for the nun of the broken heart.

Some time after the melancholy tale was ended, and the Minstrel's voice had ceased, interest and attention were kept alive by a wondrous imitation of the receding voices of the choir, and their accompaniment of organ and minute bell: when these had sunk, shaded into silence, sobs and sighs broke the stillness. Poor Aletta fainted, and was borne out of the hall accompanied by Gertruda; whose marble-like composure concealed the yet deeper connexion she bore to the mournful theme. But the sensation occasioned by the master spirit (who left the hall heedless of the expressions of admiration his spells had drawn forth), though powerful, was transitory; the hushed voices, commencing in whispers, gradually rose; and when the parting cup was circulated, there were few traces of emotion, save on one or two pale countenances. At length, to the merciful emancipation of those few tortured spirits, and to the regret of many of the gay throng, the signal was given for the breaking up of the party, when the principal actors in the drama of "Le Château d'Amour" retired to "chew the cud" of fancies, sweet or bitter as the case might be, and to ruminate or dream on the varied amusements of this chequered party of pleasure. Alas, there were some who thought not of rest that night, and who had yet a painful scene to enact ere the curtain dropped; for by the earliest dawn Gertruda was to depart for her final home!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TWO HEROINES.

But it is flown, that fairy ray
Of all its light bereft—
The dreamy mirage passed away,
And the lone desert left!

THE day of vivid enjoyment, and of life-long recollections to many, had to the Princess Bertha been one of great fatigue, disappointment, and mental effort. At its commencement, she might have sought amongst the assembled knights for one who could not well have been overlooked by a less penetrating ken—but who came not. She had obtained leave, on the plea of recent illness, to absent herself from the active business of the drama; and as she sat next the Archduchess in that same clearance in the forest in which the most important scene in her own life had occurred, the remembrance came almost with the force of reality before her, followed by that of those recent interviews which had indelibly stamped its impression and deepened its interest.

How did she long to hear the music of that voice which she had last listened to amid the din of the dance! and, if for a few brief moments she regretted not having pronounced the three little words which would have kept the speaker at her side for ever, the approach of her father brought back the recollection of sterner duties.

He did not allude to that scene of earnest life which had happened on the very spot from which they were now contemplating the graceful drama; but we will not believe that he could forget it in the presence of his daughter. Wherefore, then, did he not name it?

And thus that sun went down behind the trees of the forest, and the remembrance that ere another rose Gertruda—her

dearest friend, the companion of her youthful years—would depart for her final abode, there to spend a week in retirement, fasting, and prayer, before taking those vows which were to separate them for ever—banished all other regrets.

They had not met for many days without witnesses; the vigilant guardianship of the Abbot preventing all approach to Gertruda in public, as we have already seen; and his prudence in providing her a constant companion in Aletta equally prevented all private communication.

But Bertha's affection was not to be thus defeated; and, after dismissing Blandina, she sat alone in her room until she believed Aletta had left her friend, and then rose to seek her, and bid her a last farewell. Ere she reached the door the object of her meditations entered it.

The poor girl had thrown aside her festive attire and had resumed her novice dress. She looked so pale, so calm, so ethereal, as if she had already entered a world of spirits; but the illusion was but for a moment, the next the broken-hearted friends were clasped in each other's arms.

"I am come," said Gertruda, assuming some degree of self-possession, "to tear asunder the last links of earth, to try—but oh, how vainly!—to express to thee, my more than sister, my gratitude for every ray of joy, every bow of peace that has illuminated my otherwise clouded life."

"And has not the boon been mutual? Where but in thee have I found a friend, or sought one?" Bertha stopped for an instant, and then added, "At least, before we entered on this new world, in which new friends and new interests have sadly separated us."

"Before we part," said Gertruda, the tears again gathering in her eyes, "you shall have no reason to complain of my lack of confidence: I would, for the sake of others, I had trusted thee before."

"And wherefore not for thine own?"

"My destiny is beyond human influence."

"Oh, say not so! If you allude to Aletta—"

"Not exactly," replied Gertruda, blushing, and adding

quickly, "I knew all your efforts were already interested in her behalf."

"And in vain, alas!"

"Not so; and it is with no lightly-grounded hope I tell you that all danger of her becoming a nun is for the *present* passed away."

"Oh, joy, joy!" exclaimed Bertha, her countenance beaming with delight. "And what has brought about this happy change, that seems as sudden as her determination to profess, which I never could fathom; for, being detained by my sprained foot in my own room, I could not see how matters stood."

"You shall hear. It was Duke Leopold's special pleasure that the Earl de Courcy should be the constant companion of himself and daughters; and for a long time it was not possible for a casual observer to detect any preference shown by the young nobleman to either sister before the other. Nay, your remark to me at Castle Brunig first drew my attention to poor Aletta and her neglected bird. Then the secret of the poor little maiden's drooping spirits, her alienation from her idolized sister was revealed, as well as her sudden determination shortly after to take the veil."

Gertruda hesitated and blushed at this unwonted confession, nor was it without a slight confusion that Bertha replied,—

"I think I guess your meaning; and to one so young and artless it was but natural; but I would hear further of the rise and fall of her desire for the veil."

"The events of that evening confirmed the suspicions your remarks had raised. Aletta declined the dance; and, as we sat together at the farther end of the hall, my Lord Abbot joined us, appearing by his gentle kindness to suspect that something lay heavy at her heart. I received his commands—how needless!—to cultivate her friendship, and try to supply the place of her sister, whilst, he added, Aletta would in her turn make up that I should sustain in you. His Lordship was a constant guest at the Castle, and frequently honoured Aletta and me by his attentions. Drawing us apart, and in his most

winning manner and attractive discourse, he would expatiate on the divine enjoyment of monastic retirement, contrasting it with the noisy pleasures of the world. We both hung on his words, and were fascinated, if not convinced. One day our confessor chid me for neglecting to pray in the turret oratory, and at the same time suggested to the Princess the pleasure and profit she might derive from going thither with me and together praying before the image of the blessed Maria, which he averred was vested with peculiar sanctity and miraculous gifts; so that if our fervour were sincere and our prayers—But thou wilt not choose to hear what now—may God forgive me!—I feel unwilling to repeat.

“We went, as we were commanded, each evening at vesper-song to the oratory, and many passed by without anything noticeable occurring. I never entered it without a painful memory of what I had seen on a former occasion, of which *you* well wot, and dreaded the effect a repetition might have on my frail timid companion. My fears were too well grounded; but I dared not yield to them or your remonstrances, on the evening after our return from the christening fête, when you would fain have prevented us from entering the oratory. As we were kneeling together on the steps of the altar (the chamber lighted only by the one lamp which burned on it), a sudden and brilliant light irradiated the image of the Virgin, the eyes rolled, the lips moved and uttered some words; but the shrieks of the Princess, which brought you and Blandina to her succour, prevented my catching their meaning.”

“And did the poor affrighted child ever again return to that chamber of imagery?”

“Never! I believe no power of persuasion or coercion could have induced her to venture within it; and I date from that evening a return of her former terror of Koenigsfelden.”

“And thou, sweet maiden, were not thou afraid?”

“I can scarcely define what my feelings were. Certainly the reverence with which I first listened to what I deemed a voice from Heaven was by a discovery, which I will relate—” Here Gertruda’s voice sank almost to a whisper as she con-

tinued, "Perhaps thou may'st mind, that on the day we went to Koenigsfelden for the fete of St. Klare—and thy honoured sire walked together with us under Father Swithin's guidance through the convent garden—thou dost? Well, that self-same time, Henga detained me behind to give me some bouquets; but as I took them he said mysteriously,—

"If thy Princess would find what she has missed, let her seek it on Sister Eva's painted doll. Whether that sister, whose eyes are everywhere, mistrusted Henga's confidence or coveted his flowers, I know not; but she took all his posies from me, and chid me for talking with the poor lad, to whom she has ever borne an ill-will. His words, however, were words of truth; for I saw the lost vest where he bade me seek it, and I perceived that the owner had recognized it too."

Bertha assented; and at a moment of less interest the subject would not have been so lightly dismissed.

"I have mentioned," continued Bertha, "this striking instance of my poor Henga's watchful sagacity in order to introduce one yet more striking. After the scene you last witnessed in the oratory, I was obliged to visit it alone. You were at that time laid on your couch in the inner apartment, and I crossed the outer at an hour somewhat later than I was wont; and found the oratory imperfectly lighted by the faint rays of an autumn evening, and the altar-lamp, which burnt but dimly. I trimmed it, and knelt to repeat the vesperservice."

"My poor Gertruda, how I tremble for you!—But go on."

"I will not conceal the terror I felt, not daring to raise my eyes towards the image, lest I should behold something to terrify my poor weak senses. After a little while I thought I heard a footstep, distant as from the bottom of the tower, and then drawing nearer by a gradual ascent of the stone stairs. A gleam of hope that it might be Blandina, sent by your wakeful forethought, shot across my mind; but, no, the stairs now ascended were on the opposite side from those of the usual entrance—and though there was no apparent inlet, I thought it might probably be concealed beneath the Madonna's dra-

peries. Nearer and nearer, higher and higher, the footsteps approached until they stopped, as it appeared to my terrified apprehension, just behind the altar. There were a few moments of terrific silence, and then I thought I heard my name, gliding as it were like a whispered echo along the walls. But the beatings of my poor heart were yet more audible, and I at first thought my terror had deceived me, till it was repeated a second time more distinctly. The image opened its mouth and called me. I answered falteringly, 'Here I am; what wouldst thou, Madonna?' I do not attempt to describe the joy I felt when the well-known voice of Henga, bidding me not to be afraid, answered my appeal.

"'In the name of all good angels, my poor boy, how camest thou here,' I exclaimed.

"'I watched the fox out of his hole, and crept into it,' he replied."

Bertha clasped her hands fervently, but uttered not a word that would arrest the narrative on which she almost breathlessly hung; and Gertruda continued,—

"'You will believe how anxious I was to get Henga to quit his perilous hiding-place, which, I conclude, is hollowed out in the thick wall of the tower; but he was so amused by the complicated machinery, pulling the strings at random, and throwing the figure into various attitudes, that I had some difficulty in persuading him to depart. I have never entered that mysterious chamber since alone.'

"'Yet such are the scenes, such the people, thou wilt persist in returning to, when Heaven has almost by a miracle shown thee the abyss on which thou stand'st!' ex postulated Bertha.

"'And tremble,' replied Gertruda gently; "for I have long since fathomed its depth and darkness. But whither can I go?'

"'Oh that I had a home to offer you!' and Bertha sighed deeply as she breathed the wish, whilst it called a faint blush into Gertruda's cheek, as she thought on the one offered to her, and the hand held out to conduct her to it. For one moment the secret was on the brink of discovery: but of what

avail? to think of either were a sin; and, as the blush faded, and the smile was succeeded by an expression of firm resolution, she said,—

“ You forget, my beloved friend, that I have already a home—the home of my vows—and *once* of my choice. Moreover, my aunt bound me by a solemn adjuration never to leave Henga.”

“ This was, methinks, to exact too much from one whose claims surely were not such as to call for a life-long sacrifice.”

“ Listen, and I will confess to you what those claims are. My aunt had other and stronger reasons, doubtless, for desiring to keep the children of her unfortunate sister within the shade and shelter of a convent. I know not what those were for concealing from her beloved pupil the secret of poor Henga’s birth. Did you never, my Princess, surmise that the poor Heaven-stricken sapling was my brother, and the only remaining scion of our blasted tree? ”

“ I have sometimes thought he resembled your aunt; perhaps a little wondered at your interest in the poor lad, and his love for you; but not in either case felt a doubt of his being any other than poor Dame Hedwig’s grandson, and your companion in the Hermit’s cave—that is, until some hints of Dr. Baumgarten awakened a whole train of surmises. But continue your recital.”

“ This will I anon, but I must first tell you what I owe to this dear brother, whom men call fool. When brought, as the *supposed* child of her daughter, and at the Abbess’s command, to be daily dipped in St. Hilda’s well by Dame Hedwig; though then a child myself, it was my chief pleasure to nurse and teach him. You know from my aunt that we remained under the shelter of the blessed Hermit’s cave until I was twelve years old. The baby Henga was greatly afflicted; cruel hands had—”

“ Go on! go on! ” said Bertha, guessing too truly the cause of her friend’s hesitation. “ I know, alas, the dire deed you allude to; but *that* infant martyr was the heir of Eschenberg, not De Wart.”

“Thus it was believed, as the child was found in the castle of the Baron von Eschenburg, having been sent there by my poor mother when her own was in flames. It was carried thither by our faithful Seneschal, the husband of Dame Hedwig, in whose house we all found shelter. When the Castle of Eschenburg in its turn became the scene of pillage and destruction, the slumbering babe—my poor Henga—was discovered by—”

Here Gertruda paused, overcome by various emotions; and her deeply-sympathizing hearer interposed.

“Do not, do not distress your affectionate heart by any more details! I see it all. The faithful Seneschal brought the child to his wife. It is well known that their daughter, in whose arms my grandfather, the Emperor, breathed his last, died shortly after in childbirth. Her babe, probably, did not survive her, and thus the change was easily effected?”

Gertruda smiled gratefully on her friend for this considerate relief, and continued:—

“You have surmised rightly; and the piteous condition of poor Hanchen’s *supposed* baby, who the Leech feared would never either walk or speak, was naturally attributable to his mother’s sufferings. It was from *my* lips the little sufferer caught his first accents. It was by my help he took his first steps. He was my one care, my chief interest; and his love for me was as great as that I felt for him, and yet more undivided. He was docile and dutious to Dame Hedwig, obedient to the Hermit and my aunt; but, unless it were the filial love which burned so brightly afterwards for Father Swithin, the whole affections of his grateful heart were mine. To that excellent friend he owes the happiness of his after-life—the only hours of sunshine and liberty the poor lad ever enjoyed. You know how the dear old man laboured to get him out of the gripe of Father Anselmo, and only succeeded by a personal appeal to the Abbess.”

“Dost thou opine that my aunt deems Henga to be the son of the Baron von Wart?”

“No one can penetrate that fold of her mysterious heart;

but whether her tenderness for him proceed from a belief that the poor lad's sufferings were of her own infliction, or consequent on the deed of mercy shown to her dying sire, he is the only being to whom she shows any, notwithstanding his cold reception of her kindnesses."

"How wonderful are these instincts!" said Bertha thoughtfully. "I now see the reason of his marked dislike to all of our race."

"Not all; though even to your own sweet self Henga's civilities are somewhat of the roughest. His too evident fear of the Abbess can only have been implanted by the finger of God; but that finger has revealed yet stranger secrets to this humble seer, as we well know."

"Which I trusted might have been warnings you would not have despised."

"I dare not charge my Church with the errors of her children, or make them a pretext for breaking the vows I have made her. Yet, but for the love I bear my helpless brother, I might have been weak enough to have forgotten even these. I might have yielded to the beatings of my own treacherous heart—have tarnished my maiden name, and have drawn on one who meant me only honourable unselfish love the wrath of his family and the misery that cleaves to mine. Weep not for me, my Bertha! I shall be happy in the fulfilment of my holy duties, and in watching over my child-brother."

Bertha looked in silent admiration, nay, reverence, on the beautiful martyr, whilst the truth flashed on her mind that she, and not Aletta, was the object of de Lauffenburg's love, and the cause of his flight. Other thoughts mingled also, applicable to her own case, and kept her silent.

"You are angry, my beloved friend," continued the pleader. "Oh, let not this bitter drop be mingled in our parting cup!"

"Angry, my noble-minded girl? Would that I could follow your example, and as unhesitatingly sacrifice all dreams of selfish happiness to duty!"

Our two heroines spent yet some hours together in mutual confidence and mutual endeavours to strengthen and support

each other, through the hard trials which lay before them in their separate, but equally thorn-beset paths. The mournful farewell breathed, the young Christians sought in the retirement of their chambers the best consolation—intercessory prayer; and the blessings they implored for each other fell warm on their own lacerated hearts. Just as the dawn began to streak the eastern clouds, Gertruda stepped into the litter which was sent by the Abbess to convey Aletta as well as herself to Koenigsfelden; and she felt consoled even in this hour of bitterest regret that *she* had no participation of its anguish, and that the poor little Princess had escaped, “as a bird from the net of the fowler.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BRIDAL WREATH.

I promise thee, though autumn bare
Has swept our garden's bloom—
Though the sweet rose of autumn share
Her sister lily's tomb—
Yet I will bear from tinkling rills,
From mountain's craggy side,
Or from a deeper covert still,
A garland for the Bride.

THE party at the morrow's early meal was lessened and saddened by the departure of Gertruda—sweet Gertruda! who, loved and regretted by all, was gone—gone for ever from a world she had only looked on to enjoy and quit.

The Princesses could scarcely command their grief for the loss of this their third sister, as they affectionately termed her, sufficiently to remain at table; and, whilst the Archdukes and De Courcy delicately endeavoured to soothe it, they deeply lamented the adverse fate of the beautiful novice.

The Grand Duchess also was absent, as was De Lauffenburg: the former had gone to share Gertruda's retreat, for whom she had offered to fill the place of mother at her near approaching profession; for the absence of the Bard there seemed sufficient reason to those who had noticed his utter exhaustion from the efforts of the preceding evening.

Before the party separated, the arrival of the Abbot was announced. Leopold retired with him, De Courcy went to his friend's apartment, and the fair ladies to their bower. The Baroness had not always joined them there of late: the betrothal of Alice and the sobered spirits of Aletta had relaxed much of her watchfulness; whilst the increasing weakness and almost total blindness of her mistress called for her services in a more affecting department. The sisters, however,

vere not left long alone before De Courcy joined them, his anxious countenance betraying ere his tongue announced his fruitless search.

"I can find De Lauffenburg nowhere," he said dejectedly. "Neither can I hear of him from any one. His sleeping hamber is empty; and on his bed, which he has evidently not entered the last night, lies the festive habit he wore at the *Ste*; but his minstrel garb no longer remains in the armoire in which he hung it on the night of his arrival. His harp, too, has disappeared, and thus, doubtless, he passed undistinguished among his *joyeuse* brethren through the gates."

"Alas, my gentle cousin!" exclaimed Alice. "Can you devise no reason for his melancholy, De Courcy?"

The Earl turned to Aletta, and said, perhaps with more archness than sincerity,—

"Can *you*, my fair sister, give us any tidings of the runaway? I marvel if one kind look from you had not spared us this anxiety, and him a long heart-ache."

Aletta slightly blushed, but uttered no disclaiming word. It was evident that it did not displease her that De Courcy should believe that it was for her sake the gifted bard (a conquest worthy an empress) should have taken so eccentric a step, and even gone distraught. Poor little maiden! the feeling came not from heartless coquetry. It was natural—oh, how natural!—that, overlooked where she had hoped for preference, she was pleased to show that all did not set aside her by her favour.

Alice did not thus view the subject. She had other and adder surmises, to which she did not give utterance until a summons for Aletta to attend her father left the young couple together to compare their suspicions on the true cause of De Lauffenburg's departure, and to lament over the fatal barrier between two such beloved friends.

Since the shock of the talking image, and the grave austernities to which she had been subjected had perceptibly reviewed her sister's aversion to a monastic life, Alice's fear on her account had greatly subsided; her interest in Gertruda's

fate had been quickened, and, happy in her own confiding love, she generously sympathized with the blight that had fallen on the prospects of her friend: not that the subject had ever been touched on between them, for Alice's views of the sanctity of Gertruda's engagements were as strict as those she herself entertained. She had discerned the unmistakeable evidences of De Lauffenburg's passion, and had watched with tearful eyes the change that its hopelessness had wrought on himself and on the object of it.

But we return to Aletta. The motives already mentioned had induced her readily to accede to the wishes of her friends, and to postpone her novitiate; to which, to the surprise of both father and daughter, the Abbot had readily consented. Perhaps the hope of her becoming the consort of the Prince of Naples, instead of her cousin Bertha, might have had some influence in his ready acquiescence; but his chief reason was that a closer observance of her character had convinced him that Aletta was unfit to fill the distinguished position in which he had contemplated placing her; and, to do the prelate justice, it was not his nature or his practice to inflict ~~unmerciful~~ cruelty.

How he adjusted the balance is another matter. Aletta did not suit his purpose as future Abbess of Koenigsfelden, so the useless little bird he had taken so much pains to ensnare was to be let free. Gertruda *did*; and, however painful captivity might be, she must endure it.

The same close investigation which had discovered the incompetency of the one had brought forward the value of the other. Gertruda's character wanted nothing but opportunity to develop its varied excellence. Like a beautiful flower whose bud remains closed in cold and darkness, if placed in the sun opens, blushes, and emits a delicious perfume; so this sweet cloistered blossom had daily expanded beneath the sunny beams of love and friendship, exciting the admiration of the Abbot, whose appreciation of the morally beautiful was dulled but not eradicated—dulled to perceive that the convent was not the fitting stage to display the graces

he admired, and to the duty of sacrificing his ambition to the happiness of a fellow-creature. But let us not do him injustice. Might he not hesitate in believing that the union of these young people would be for their happiness? As the daughter of him whom his family believed the murderer of the head of their house, would they not spurn her? and as the dedicated novice of Koenigsfelden, would she not incur universal odium if forgetful of her vows? moreover, and his conscience was furthermore appeased by the suggestion, had he not given back the Princess Aletta even at the foot of the altar?

The week of probation passed by, and the day fixed for the ceremony was the morrow. The whole court of Hapsburg were to be present, but De Lauffenburg had not returned. How could the sensitive lover bear to witness the sacrifice of the object of his fondest hopes, of his most romantic dreams, of his first and only love; for such natures as his love but once. Had he seen any chance of removing Gertruda's conscientious scruples, there was no enterprise, however rash, he would not have undertaken to free her from her vows—and even then? Yes, the Prior of St. Gothard was right: "Let the boy dream on;" and he did dream on, and even amid his baffled hopes, he was not wholly miserable.

We once more peep into the convent garden ere the spell that called it into life, coloured its fruits, and scented its flowers, be dissolved; but this time Father Swithin is alone. The Eden, too, is changed—its fruits garnered and blossoms faded. That marvel of horticulturalists has, however, contrived even now to collect a fair show of autumnal flowers, which he is wreathing with evergreens and immortelles dyed of all hues; and though Henga was not just then near him, he addressed him as if bodily presence was not necessary in such a close union of souls.

"'Tis but a sorry concern, son. I would that Flora (be she saint or goddess, for verily I begin to forget the difference) would come and foot it lightly over our faded parterres; so that, as the legend has it, fresh flowers might spring up beneath her footsteps, and we might grace our pretty Gertruda's

profession with fairer garlands. If I were the Pope, the Emperor, or even Jupiter, I would make a law that there should be no professions, births, deaths, or bridals after the last Michaelmas daisies or before the first primroses; for what are either of these festivals without flowers? Didst thou ever reflect, boy, on the supererogatory bounty of our Almighty Father in giving us such lovely sweet-smelling evidences of His complacence? He might, as thou knowest, have provided for our necessities without this indulgent catering for our enjoyments. Man might have lived without the rose, the lily, or the jessamine."

"And died, and been buried without rosemary and cypress," said Henga, who had approached near enough to hear the father's last truism.

"Pshaw! boy, what puts dying in thy head on this bright eve? But come, employ thy ready wit and nimble fingers to frame this posy: it is for the throne of the bride."

Henga shook his head.

"Then lend a hand in fashioning this festoon. Nay, look not so mournfully! At the least thou wilt not fail me in the promised crown, wreath, or coronal as it is variously called, for the new-made spouse?"

"*I have said it,*" replied Henga, in a solemn and somewhat reproachful tone, as if he thought his friend doubted his word or ability. Truth to say, implicitly as he relied on the one, and highly as he estimated the other, the experimental gardener was not perfectly at his ease in trusting this most important item in the morrow's programme to the chance of Henga's mutations, or the season's lingering blossoms; and he ventured, not without hesitation, to ask,—

"But where wilt thou cull thy flowers, my son, when all are now faded in field and garden? I had much ado to find the few I have here. But lend thy ear, and I will confide to thee; for life is fleeting, and I may not again have so convenient an opportunity of whispering in it the secret by which I have preserved these roses and lilies, and the colouring matter I have applied to these faded immortelles. But thou

dost not heed me—Well, well,” continued the indulgent gardener, who knew Henga’s humour too well to hope to restrain it, “thou shalt learn the process another time. Yet take at present some of my prepared dye to colour thy flowers.”

“They are already died,” said Henga, with a peculiar emphasis.

Father Swithin looked inquiringly at the youth, and combated the vague doubts and apprehensions which crept over him by a cheerful smile, as he drew on his pseudo-classic memories.

“I would that we had a few of those flowers which the fair Proserpine let fall from her apron when—when—Well, we will not stay to inquire about whens or wheres at this busy time; but do thou take these flowers which I have purposely laid aside for thy garland.”

Henga pushed them disdainfully away, and threw himself at the foot of a tree—and, with his elbows resting on his knees and face buried in his hands, remained silent.

“Why, Henga, my dear son, what aileth thee? I thought to have seen thee blithe of mien and light of step on this eve of the return of thy dove to her cote, to take flight from it no more.”

Henga arose, and placing himself on his knees before Father Swithin as he sat on a low bench arranging his flowers, laid a hand on each of the old man’s shoulders, shook back his hair, and with his soft hazel eyes filled with tears, looked earnestly in his face, until sympathetic drops ran down the father’s furrowed cheeks.

“Father,” he said, with an unwonted calm intelligence, “dost thou remember our favourite linnets, Gold Cap and Silver Wing?”

The father bowed the assent he could not utter, for there was a mournful expression in the boy’s beautiful countenance which inspired awe as well as pity.

“They lived and loved together in winter’s frost and summer’s sun, till one morn the door of their cage was left open, and Silver Wing flew away. Gold Cap remained; for you

know, father, he was a sickly bird, whom I had delivered from the gripe of a hawk that left the mark of his talons on its tender throat, and he cared not to leave his perch or his benefactor. Silver Wing did not entirely relish his liberty either, without his friend, and came each morn to perch upon his cage and sing, and both seemed content, till one day the door was left open, Silver Wing went in, and a ruthless hand closed it. Oh, my father, thou know'st the rest!"

"I do, dear son. The foolish little truant beat himself to death against the wires of his prison."

"And poor Gold Cap, father?"

"The dear, loving creature pined and died."

The tears of Henga now flowed unchecked, for the kind old man was himself unable for some time to speak. He had always imagined there was an oracular meaning in the utterances of Henga, and a faint shadowing forth of his little allegory passed before his mind's eye.

Anxious, yet unable to turn his own thoughts from its melancholy forebodings, he endeavoured to divert those of Henga by calling on him once more to help; but when he raised his head, the boy had fled, leaving poor Swithin to tie up his half-withered flowers without it, and for once in his life glad to see the round figure of Sister Eva approach.

"Where is Henga?" said she, darting at one of the gardener's most elaborate festoons. "I came to commission him to gather *me* some flowers for my St. Klare's crown, but these will serve my turn as well."

"Softly, good sister," replied Swithin, with the little mischievous laugh Eva knew full well; "relax thy hold I pray. Surely thou, who canst work miracles to supply thy saint with a petticoat, cannot lack my poor flowers for a head-gear!"

The nun looked a little askew at the jest, relaxed her grasp on the garland, and said with her ready *tact*,—

"But where is Henga; for even should the saint provide her own flowers, I shall need his taste to arrange them."

Softened by this opportune compliment to Henga's skill, Swithin said he believed the boy might be found on the margin

of the lake, as it was about the hour he fed his children (as he called them) on its banks; and feeling sure Sister Eva would follow him, whether he asked her or not, he courteously invited her to accompany him thither.

It was on the sides of the identical little lake, already described as the locality of the *goose*-bearing tree, that they found our *antecedent* Robinson Crusoe, and like him "monarch of all he surveyed"—the calm waters rippling at his feet, and behind him a grove of trees, now glowing with the rich hues of autumn; and where the leaves had dropped, their place had been filled by innumerable little birds with plumage as bright. Nor did these compose the whole of Henga's feathered subjects; the island was tenanted by various kinds of water-fowl, and the lake dimpled with its finny tribes.

Father Swithin laid his finger on his lips to signal Sister Eva to silence, as they stood concealed by some evergreens to watch Henga's proceedings.

For a few minutes nothing was heard but a twittering of the birds amongst the branches, and now and then a splash on the water.

Presently, a clear whistle glided over the surface of the water, and was as clearly echoed from behind the island; and anon flocks of wild fowl came, half-flying, half-swimming, towards the bank. Shoals of fish approached also, and the carp, tamer than the rest, glittered beneath the shallow ripple.

Henga now approached with a large osier basket of grain that he threw with unsparing hand around, gently reproving the more rapacious for their greediness, and bidding them share the bounties of Providence ungrudgingly with their feebler brethren.

"Why the Jungfer is a second St. Francis," exclaimed Sister Eva, in unfeigned amazement at Henga's unlooked-for eloquence. "The Saint himself never preached a better homily. Even his wonderful sermon to the larks scarcely outdoes it."

Father Swithin nodded a delighted assent, but again placed his finger on his lip and pointed to the preacher.

"And now," pursued Henga, "my winged brethren, having

satisfied your hunger, and finished your evening meal, spread your wings and away to your sedgy nests, praising God ~~for~~ His bounties. And ye, my cousins of the flood, do ye ~~too~~ retire."

Clapping his hands, he sang in his clear, fine treble, and in Latin, this following verse from the canticle *Benedicite, omnia opera* : " O all ye fowls of the air, bless ye the Lord : praise Him and magnify Him for ever." Whilst the sea-fowl, circling round his head with wild cries, then flew across the lake, and darted down into their nests on the island ; the fish, equally obedient, though not so graceful, retired to their homes in the deeper waters around it.

And now Henga turned to the expectant congregation amongst the trees, whose twitterings showed some signs of impatience, and said in a tone of mild expostulation,—

" Hist ! hist ! my children ; it is not because I love you less that I have tended you last. No, my beloved, I have wearied to turn to you. Come, then, my little ones, to your father's arms."

Saying this, he stretched out both arms, and in an instant his head, breast and arms were covered with the loving flock —some pecking his lips, some nestling in his bosom. It was difficult to make out poor Henga's terms of endearment, so stifled was he by the soft caresses of his little ethereals ; but something he said about " rewarding their love with some dainty seed reared expressly for them by their kind Grand-father Swithin ;" so that at the signal whistle the pretty creatures flew down on the ground, strewn with the same pearly seed, and ate their fill.

" And now, my children," said Henga, " we will sing our vesper hymn, and then hie home to our nests."

He commenced the chant with a low, sweet whistle. His choristers distended their little throats, each striving for the lead, till the master of the choral band, dropping the softer accompaniment, sang the Vesper Hymn aloud in conventional Latin, and thus concluded the concert.

He then clapped his hands as before, and ere the listeners

behind their laurel screen could reach the theatre of this novel exhibition, Henga and his *corps dramatique* had vanished.

It was a busy evening for Father Swithin and all the convent functionaries : so many draperies to hang and garlands to fix, and so many lamps to trim. Then there were masses in the chapel, and services of extra length in the choir. But there are no feet more noiseless and nimble, no hands more skilful, no heads more methodical, than those of the cloister. Arrangement is their business, method their watchword, display their object ; thus the effect of the combined motive and material is admirable ; and these, and more touching adjuncts, were united to enhance the profession of the Novice of Koenigsfelden, for she was a great favourite amongst the sisters, and, moreover, the chief ornament of their convent.

Denied all *personal* possessions, all interests, family or social ; sworn to obedience, poverty, and celibacy, the whole pride and ambition of the recluse is centred—first, in his Church ; next, to that particular order to which he belongs ; and, lastly, the interest increasing in intensity as the circle narrows, in the community of which he forms a portion, the monastic building he inhabits.

Thus every nun of Koenigsfelden, from the Abbess down to the youngest lay sister, looked on Gertruda as her own *speciality* ; and her grace, rank, beauty, and accomplishments, not as belonging to herself alone, but as a general inheritance. It mattered not how old, ugly, or stupid they themselves were, she was young, beautiful, accomplished, and high born, and she was theirs ; and though they loved and pitied her, though they knew from fatal experience how distasteful and dreary a convent life was, there were few amongst them who had not used their little arts and cajolery to tempt her into the cage, against the wires of which they secretly beat their own wings.

But bigotry and deception are not altogether shut up within the walls of a convent, although their mildewed shade is eminently favourable to the growth of such noisome weeds.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PROFESSION.

Nearer, now, in rapid motion
Rolls the fast-approaching wave—
Oh, who from the threat'ning ocean,
Shall that lost one seek and save ?

THE day appointed for Gertruda's final leave-taking of the outer world at length dawned, bright and beautifully; but it found her chief friend unfit both in mind and body to take her part in the ceremony.

Dr. Baumgarten, who felt how trying it would be for both, interposed his authority, and his patient, thus spared all importunity, remained quietly in her chamber.

The Abbey church was filled at an early hour by the neighbouring families, all eager to view the profession of the beautiful postulant whom they had lately met in far different scenes; eager, too, to view the procession by which she was to be conducted to the altar.

But the hour had sounded from the Abbey tower, and yet it came not. The chimes of another quarter dragged out its drawling tune, and yet no murmur of approaching chant was heard.

What mighty cause can have arrested the course of that wonderful piece of human mechanism, in which the springs and wheels were so nicely adjusted that each part, like a planet in its orbit, was destined to move in undeviating rotation round the central sun? That cause, mighty as its effect, was the non-appearance of Henga and the *Bridal Crown*. Henga, whose eccentric movements submitted to no laws, was nowhere to be found!

Messengers had been despatched in all directions, but they failed to bring him. Sister Eva was in aguish fits of an-

guish and admiration—she whose distinguished office it was to deliver the crown into the jewelled fingers of the Abbot, to be by them placed on the spouse's head after they had shorn that beauteous head of its glory. And now the procession will surely come, and she must take her place in it without the insignia of her office—Henga's eagerly-expected coronal.

Oh, how she did deprecate the poor Pope, and half wish Henga had tumbled into his own fish-pond, and the fish had eaten him, sooner than such a catastrophe had happened as this unhappy chasm in the otherwise perfect programme!

She did not utter this pious benediction in Father Swithin's ear, who stood by in equal but silent dismay; for now he remembered Henga's emotion the evening before, and his but half-understood allegory of his linnets' fate. He recollects also, that the boy had been restless and wayward for some days, had obstinately refused to aid in the festive preparations, and had even hidden or destroyed a holiday suit which the Abbess had caused to be made for him for the occasion. All this was a mystery to honest Swithin, who saw nothing but cause of rejoicing in the return of their favourite, more especially as the Abbess had promised she should be free to visit the garden as formerly, and help to tie up the *féte*-day bouquets. Still, nothing could shake his faith in his disciple and his assurance that he would appear—a little too late, perhaps—with a bridal crown worthy the occasion. But the procession begins to move, and he is obliged to go forward with it.

How shall we find words grandiloquent enough to describe its elastic sinuosity and mediæval magnificence, as it glided along the cloisters and threaded the pillared aisles of the church? First marched a preluding band of subordinate performers, white-robed and bearing banners of various colours and devices, followed by a gorgeous band of priests, preceding the pavilioned host, the tassels of whose embroidered canopy were held by the magnates of the order, the Prior, Sub-prior, and Sacristan. The image of the founders, St. Francis and St. Klare, came next, surrounded by an equal number of satellites; but all hearts and eyes were turned from

them to be fixed on the beautiful postulant, who next appeared—the Abbot and Archduchess on either side, and the Princesses Alice and Aletta following.

Poor Gertruda! she was indeed a lovely victim, and she looked and moved a queen. Still, neither victim nor queen is the right designation, for there was more of the calm abstraction of the martyr in her demeanour. It was evident, to all who could understand her lofty self-abnegation, that to her the present was wholly absorbed in the past and the future: in the one she saw only the sorrowing forms of Bertha and De Lauffenburg; in the other, the service of her God and the solace of her helpless brother. But whilst her mind was unclouded by a doubt of the imperative duty of her self-imposed sacrifice, it was not in ignorance of its cost, or of the dreary future it entailed, that she had offered it: like the self-immolating martyr, who approaches the pyre in the full consciousness of its burning intensity.

Amongst the elaborate preparations for the pageant, it will be supposed that nothing was omitted to heighten the effect of the foreground figure. Her dress had been the subject of more than one conclave, at which the Lord Abbot himself assisted, and to his more refined taste Gertruda owed her escape from the cumbrous and long-hoarded coronation robe (which it was the express wish of the ex-Queen, now Abbess of Koenigsfelden, should have been displayed on the occasion), and that the present of Duke Albert was substituted for its cumbrous and somewhat tarnished magnificence—that robe linked with so many memories! The superb tiara of diamonds, however, could not be declined, and the Abbess herself directed the trembling fingers of Sister Ethel how to fasten it amid the beautiful tresses that were so soon to be laid on the altar: a mistaken sacrifice to One who gave to woman this beautiful adornment, and whose Word teaches us that it is her glory.*

Next in the order of procession walked the nuns of Koenigs-

felden, their persons shrouded in long cloaks of ample dimensions, and the large lighted taper borne by each failing to penetrate the thick veil which fell in folds over their countenances. The stately Agnes walked last, bearing her abbatial crook and mitre. Her calm statue-like features were unveiled, but her lofty form was shrouded in a cloak of ermine. She took her seat on a throne erected on one side of the high altar, her nuns grouping themselves with studied effect around it; whilst the Abbot, leaving his kneeling charge on its steps, seated himself on a throne of similar construction on the other side, surrounded also by his monastic satellites.

And now followed a few minutes of silence, so breathless that it seemed as if the arrested procession and eager spectators had hardened into stone. Not a whisper, not even the hum of a summer fly or the buzz of imprisoned bee, moved the silent air, till the rolling diapasons of the organ broke the oppressive stillness, accompanied by the voices of the choir chanting in effective chorus the *Eructavit cor meum*, the supposed epithalamium of the Hebrew monarch, the mystic symbol of the marriage of Christ with His spouse the Church, and therefore usually selected for occasions like the present. High mass, with its pompous ceremonials, was next celebrated. At its close the pale postulant arose and approached the regal Abbess, who descended some steps, embraced her, and demanded what she desired.

"I humbly crave your permission, reverend mother, to enter the sisterhood of St. Klare, in this your Abbey of Koenigsfelden," replied the suppliant, "and to become the humblest of your daughters."

This formulary of the Order was uttered in low but unhesitating accents, and was answered by the Superior in the same prescribed terms, "that if her admission, so dutifully craved, was in accordance with the wishes of her beloved daughters, she would right gladly admit the petitioner amongst their happy number."

Thereupon the Abbess laid her hand on the head of the kneeling candidate and pronounced a solemn benediction in

conventional Latin, kissed her fair brow, and returned to her chair of state. The petition for admittance into the sisterhood had to be repeated separately to each nun, all of whom received their new sister affectionately with a kiss of welcome, and the Abbot then came forward to receive and conduct her back to the altar, amid the jubilant hallelujahs of the choir. Again, with dramatic effect, all was hushed, and expectation raised to a breathless degree, whilst pity and regret struggled in many breasts, as kneeling at the feet of her spiritual father the lovely victim calmly prepared to pronounce the fatal vow of irrevocable seclusion.

“My daughter,” demanded the Abbot, in a voice that betrayed emotion, which he evidently endeavoured to suppress, —“my daughter, is it thy desire in truthful earnestness to become the spouse of Christ?”

“Such is verily and truly my wish,” was the reply.

“Wilt thou from henceforth renounce the world, its pomps and vanities, and live a dedicated vestal, taking on thee the vows of poverty, obedience, and celibacy in the Order of the blessed St. Klare?”

“Such, God helping me, is my resolve.”

“In token thereof, my well-beloved daughter, I cast from thee these vain baubles of earthly vanity,” and saying this the Abbot disengaged the jewelled diadem from the fair brow that had so well become it, loosening thereby the long tresses of fair hair, which fell like a golden web adown the back and over the shoulders of the wearer, whose pale cheeks, from the sudden movement, was tinged with a blush which was soon succeeded by a yet more deadly whiteness. The Abbot saw it, and hastened to terminate the painful scene. “And even these adornments of nature, my daughter, must be laid on the altar,” and his hands trembled as he gathered up the rich luxuriance within it, and stretched out the other to receive the fatal shears.

Alas, alas, poor Sister Eva! she hesitated, reluctant that the beautiful head should be shorn of its glory ere she had another crown to place on it.

Henga ! Henga ! where art thou ?" and in her agony she ed his name aloud.

He hear the call ? A scuffle at the door of the church, ing the silence of suspense, turned all eyes from the t that had so long riveted them to one of almost equal est—Henga and the eagerly-expected garland. Rushing e guards at the gate, tearing himself from the loving of Father Swithin, Henga entered the church. His hair, n back from his face,

“ Streamed like a meteor to the troubled air ; ”

reeks were deeply flushed, his eyes glowed like the embers e hearth, and in his right hand, held high above his fluttered the eagerly-expected *bridal crown*—a strange, erious garland of withered immortelles almost crum- into dust, tied together with bows and long ends of and yellow ribbon equally time-worn. Striding up rowded aisle, and pushing aside all who impeded his ess, he reached the high altar, gazed for one minute streaming eyes on the kneeling Gertruda, placed the erious garland on her head, and vanished like a falling

ader, if thou hast failed to remember the early history of fatal garland, there was one now present who recalled it so well, with all its burning memories.

ing from her seat, the wretched Agnes uttered a piercing and, pointing to the receding apparition, remained as one bound, motionless and speechless, her eyes fixed, her arm ded, the long white finger pointed in vacancy. But how pt to describe the scene that followed ?

e arm of the Abbot prevented the fall of the fainting girl, t Leopold, pushing aside all other assistance, bore her in ms into the vestry. The nuns gathered trembling around Superior ; Sister Ethel stood ready prepared with her lies, which she applied with the usual result, and the ss passively suffered herself to be conducted to her own ment.

Dr. Baumgarten was prompt in his attendance, but his skill was for a long time powerless in restoring life to his patient, who lay pale and senseless in the arms of Blandina ; whilst the sister Princesses hung over her, their warm tears falling on her marble brow.

At the end of two hours, a smile which lightened the countenance of the Leech, as he kept his finger unremittingly on the wrist of the reviving patient, gave the happy notice of returning life.

Gertruda opened her eyes, and murmured the name of Henga.

“ He shall be sought and cared for, and screened from all blame,” whispered the Princess Alice, as she bent to kiss the fair brow.

Gertruda’s eyes again closed, and Dr. Baumgarten, fearing a relapse, obtained the permission of the Abbot to remove his patient to the hospital, and to enforce perfect retirement.

“ I cannot,” he said to the deeply interested inquirers, “ answer for the consequences of so sudden a shock on nerves already stretched to their utmost. She must see no one but the hospital nurse and her doctor.”

“ And to whose care could we better confide our beloved daughter ? ” said the Abbot.

Then, turning to the Princesses, he courteously invited them to take some refreshment in his private apartments, assuring them that Sister Monica (Gertruda’s conventional name) should be carefully nursed, and intelligence of her state duly forwarded to the Castle.

The royal party accepted the hospitality offered, and before their departure heard from the doctor that Gertruda, “ though feverish and restless, had been restored to consciousness.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DREAM AND ITS FULFILMENT.

In thoughts from the visions of the
Night, when deep sleep falleth on men,
A thing was secretly brought to me,
And mine ear received a little thereof.

More than one aching head pressed a sleepless pillow that night in the Castle of Hapsburg. The watchful Leech came late in the evening to bring intelligence from the Abbey, and also to inquire for the Princesses, all of whom he found in great need of all the comfort he could bring them, and that was but little, though administered with tact and discretion.

The Abbess, he told them, appeared to feel no effects from the shock she had undergone, nor, indeed, to retain any recollection of the events of the morning, as she had spoken of Gertruda's profession as a thing of the future. Of Gertruda herself, although he did not confess his more serious apprehensions, he could not report favourably. She was restless, feverish, and at times delirious; calling on Henga to loosen the garland he had bound so tightly on her brow. Then, in intervals of consciousness, she would ask tenderly for the Princesses, and charge her doctor not to let them grieve for her, for she was quite contented and should soon be better. Of poor Henga Dr. Baumgarten could give no account, as he could nowhere be found. It was feared, too, that he must suffer from want of food, as Dame Hedwig said he had refused to touch his morning meal. The night, moreover, threatened to be wet and stormy; and, to complete the gloomy anticipations, the doctor was full of affectionate apprehensions for Father Swithin, and of the effect of his continued wanderings in search of his beloved son.

"The human frame," added this close observer, "is like a

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time-worn building, which outwardly may look fair and strong ; but pull out one stone from its walls, or tear away the ivy that roots in its crevices, and it speedily falls to the earth."

Having directed Blandina in the preparation of some herbs of soothing properties for his patients, and trusting the administration into her careful hands, Dr. Baumgarten took his leave, scarcely hoping that his sleeping potion would counteract the intelligence he felt obliged to give, as a preparative for that yet sadder which he feared the morning would announce.

Blandina performed her commission with the most scrupulous fidelity, the House-dame furnishing the necessary ingredients of dried herbs and spices, and watching their gentle simmering the prescribed time.

She then administered the aromatic potion to each weary and weeping patient, and watched by her own sweet charge until she perceived her eyes to close in sleep, even whilst the tears struggled through their lids ; after which, overpowered by fatigue, she retired to rest in her own chamber.

Bertha slept heavily—probably from the effect of the sleeping potion—for two hours, and then awoke, roused, as she imagined, by a voice calling on her by name to rise. She sat up for some time, and then lay down, but in a perturbation of spirit which prevented her sleeping for a little while. Forgetfulness, however, again crept over her, and again she heard the same call, "Princess Bertha, arise ! arise !" The voice evidently proceeded from the turret oratory, and this time she hastened to obey its call. Hastily quitting her bed, she took up her lamp. It burned dimly, and, in essaying to trim it, it went out, and left her in darkness ! And now how weary was her search for the key of the turret staircase ! and, when found, she tried in vain to turn it in the lock. A blast of wind proceeding from within at length burst open the door ; but how shall she climb the stairs, half of which were entirely broken, and the others crumbled beneath her footsteps ? This dangerous ascent was, however, at length attained, and she entered the mysterious oratory. The lamp stood, as usual, on the altar, but on the pedestal, occupied formerly

by the image of the Madonna, appeared—did her eyes deceive her? could it be Henga? It was—yet so gaunt and wan.

“Food! food!” he cried, “I perish with hunger!”

There lay a bunch of grapes on the altar. Bertha eagerly seized and offered it to him; but, dashing it to the ground, he exclaimed,—

“Thinkest thou I will eat of the sacrifice offered to idols?”

Rebuked, and abashed at what she considered a reasonable reproof, Bertha cast down her eyes, and, when she at length raised them, behold! Henga no longer stood before her, but his place was filled by a hideous image, which, extending his bony arms, clasped her in them, and held her so tightly against his iron ribs that she could not breathe. She tried to cry out for help, but no sound would pass her lips; to fly, but her limbs refused their office. At length, exerting her utmost strength in a final effort, she freed herself from the *incubus*, awoke—“and behold it was a dream.”

It was some time before the dreamer could collect her agitated spirits sufficiently to feel it to have been only such; nor did the return of her awakened faculties diminish the solemn importance of the vision, for they recalled to her memory Gertruda’s account of Henga’s visit to the concealed passage, and she hesitated not to obey what she considered a divine call to seek him therein. It is true, that in the yet agitated state of her nerves, it was some time before she could summon resolution to visit the scene in which they had received so many shocks; but after a fervent prayer for strength and guidance she arose, dressed herself in a loose robe, and left her chamber, meaning to go to that of Blandina and rouse her to accompany her—But no, the faithful creature was sick and weary, and she would go alone.

The dawn had begun faintly to streak the eastern sky, but her lamp had burned down to the socket, thus far verifying her dream. The key of the turret door, however, was happily in the lock, neither were the steps in any dangerous state of dilapidation; so that the summit was easily gained. But, brave as our heroine was, her stout heart beat and her hand

trembled as she laid it on the latch and entered the "chamber of imagery."

All within was in its usual order: the image on its pedestal, the altar with its usual decorations, and the lamp burning bright above it; but, nothing daunted and nothing doubting, with a firm faith in the warning of her dream, and an abiding conviction of the vicinity of Henga, Bertha approached the statue, and placing her mouth close to its lips softly pronounced his name. All was silent. She again called on him, adjuring him in the names of Gertruda and Father Swithin to speak. A low but audible groan was the only response, but it was enough to assure her that Henga was there, perhaps dying, and that there was no time to be lost. "I must now call Blandina and consult what can be done to rescue the perishing boy," was her first thought.

The affectionate guardian needed no rousing. She had heard as she imagined her lady's call, had hastened to answer it, and was crossing the antechamber as Bertha entered it on her descent from the oratory. Blandina's faith in the dream and its fulfilment was implicit, and she equally confirmed the fears of the Princess, lest succour might even now be too late. They revisited the oratory and endeavoured to arouse the attention of the sufferer, but in vain; and the only sound they could distinguish was a quick and laboured breath which eventually subsided.

"He is dead!" exclaimed Bertha. "Oh, my poor Gertruda. But come with me to my chamber, and let us consult how to procure assistance, if happily it be not too late."

The question was of difficult solution and the sun arose on their conference. Bertha at length proposed to summon the Leech and get him to acquaint the Abbot, who was undoubtedly acquainted with the secret staircase and could extricate poor Henga from his perilous imprisonment.

"Nay, my Princess, it would be a dangerous experiment to tell that proud man that you have discovered his secrets. Our Leech's safety must not be placed on such a venture. Let me go."

“No, Blandina, no! I would seek him myself—But softly! I have just thought of a better way. Do thou go at once and rouse good Everard whilst I prepare a note that *he* shall bear to the Abbot.”

And Bertha wrote thus:—

*“To the Right Honourable and Most Reverend the Lord
Abbot of Kœnigsfelden.*

“MY LORD ABBOT,—Having been this last night advertised by a notable dream, that the poor strayed lad Henga, so especially considered by the royal Abbess, lies now in a state of great bodily weakness and extreme necessity in some concealed recess of the eastern tower of this castle, I do beseech you, reverend father, if the approach to the same be known to your lordship, not to slight this, as I believe, Heaven-vouchsafed warning, but to send at once in search of this perishing youth, and for ever oblige,

“Your dutiful daughter,
“BERTHA.”

Old Everard speedily and faithfully executed his embassy, delivered the letter into the Abbot’s own hand, and brought back a message from his own lips (with an apology that the urgency of the Princess’s request did not allow of his committing to paper), that “not a moment should be lost in attending to her Highness’s commands.”

The pleasant morning chamber, or then so-called “Lady’s Bower,” was vacant that day. The Archduchess went to the Abbey to inquire for the Abbess and Gertruda; the gentlemen, too, had left the Castle not to return to it for some days; whilst the sister Princesses were both ill from fright and fatigue. The repose was as grateful as it was needful to our exhausted heroine, and she passed the entire morning on her couch, in melancholy musings on the past and vigorous resolves for the future, occasionally exchanging a word with her faithful nurse, who sat knitting beside her.

From time to time, she despatched this trusty messenger

with inquiries and attentive courtesies to her cousins, and also to the House-dame, to find out if any servant had arrived from the Abbey, or any intelligence had been received of Henga. And thus wore away the day, so still, so calm, so unlike those which preceded it. The sun was getting low on the horizon and the evening breezes beginning to stir the branches of the trees, causing the bright but crisped leaves to fall in showers to the earth—when Blandina returned from one of her missions, bringing with her a most welcome visitor in the person of Doctor Baumgarten.

The first inquiry was for Gertruda.

“That she is not *worse* I consider a favourable symptom ——
I can hardly report her better.”

“And my aunt?”

“Just as I reported last evening. The shock has left no ——
trace on the calm rigidity of her countenance or demeanour ——
indeed, I have never known her to retain any recollection o — f
the exciting cause of her fearful seizures.”

“It thus would appear that their influence extended to the ——
memory?”

“And well, poor lady, that it is so,” replied the Leech ,
with a very deep sigh. “But for these seasons of forgetfulness ——
the gnawings of remorse must long ago have shattered her —
reason, if not destroyed her life.”

“Yet it does not appear that memory fails her in regard to —
events long past, for by this token witness her recollection o — f
the mysterious garland. Oh, Doctor Baumgarten, I prithee —
tell me,” pursued Bertha, with eagerness, “can that faded
coronal have been the one so fatally offered by the Emperor Albert to —”

“The unfortunate John of Suabia? Such is my belief —
drawn from the still more unfortunate Agnes’s recognition o — f
it and some words she uttered in her delirium. But how to
account for its getting into Henga’s possession I know not,
unless it were —”

“Is the lad found?” eagerly interrupted Bertha, forgetting
the lesser in the greater interest.

The Doctor answered mournfully, "He *is* found, but soon I fear to be lost to us for ever. Yet wherefore weep for him, dear lady?—and you, Blandina, mourn not for one who is more fitted for the companionship of angels than of his fallen mortals. Let us rather rejoice that he should be taken before those aged protectors who shield his helplessness." But the Doctor's fast-filling eyes belied his counsel.

Bertha's first impulse was to tell him the adventures of the past night; but remembering Blandina's caution, she only asked,—

"Did *you* discover poor Henga's hiding-place?"

"No. The first intelligence I received of its having been found was a summons to attend him at his home at his grandame's, to which some officials of the Abbey had carried him. I found him, poor harmless being, quite exhausted and almost insensible. We placed him in his bed, rubbed his stiffened limbs, and having succeeded in forcing a little warm cordial down his throat, he gradually recovered his consciousness. His first inquiry was for Gertruda, but he readily acquiesced in the impossibility of her visiting him, only begging to see Father Swithin, who was already on the threshold, and will not leave him. Always devout, Henga's next desire was to receive the last offices of the Church; and preparations being afoot for the administration of the sacred rites, I took the opportunity of a few minutes' liberty, telling him whom I was about to visit. 'Do you think the Princess Bertha would come and see poor Henga?' he said eagerly, fixing his mournfully beautiful eyes on me. 'She is Gertruda's friend, and she would take my parting-gift to her and tell her not to grieve;' and here the poor boy broke down and wept silently for a little while. But I must be brief," continued the Doctor; "the day is waning, and—" He could not finish the sentence, but Bertha comprehended its allusion and said,—

"You answered for my ready acquiescence in dear Henga's wish I am sure. Blandina and myself will not detain you one minute ere we are ready to accompany you to his bed-side."

The sorrowing trio descended the steep knowle on which

the Tower of the Hawk still stands, though now only a ruin—
winded through the narrow forest paths to the brink of the
crystal stream, and stood reverentially at the garden gate to
let the priest, who had borne the host, pass through.

A few short weeks only had gone by since Bertha had
bounded over the same paths with her now lost Gertruda, in
the wild joyousness of a newly found liberty—and now? Yet
even now there was a chastened solemnity of spirit, a peace in
the inward soul that better fitted her for the solemn scene on
which she was about to enter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE VESPER HYMN.

Oh, could thy spirit teach us now,
Full many a truth the gay might learn ;
The value of a blameless life
Full many a scorner might discern.

THE chamber of the dying boy was approached by an outward gallery, from whence it was entered through a casement, one of whose sides, being near the little uncircumcised bed, was shaded from the western sun, now near its setting, by a slight crimson curtain. The other side was open, and near this Bertha stood, whilst the doctor prepared his patient for her visit, deeply interested in the scene within.

The countenance of the dying boy had undergone that beautiful transformation not unusual at the approach of death, and seemed already gleaming with light from heaven. His eyes were raised, his lips slightly apart, and his head turned as if

“ He heard a voice none else could hear,
That bade him not delay,
He saw a hand none else could see,
That beckoned him away.”

Father Swithin knelt on one side of the bed, gazing lovingly on his adopted son, and with an awe that seemed to check the current of his tears; one hand grasped that of Henga, the other was laid on the neck of a large mastiff, the guardian of Dame Hedwig’s homestead, and one of her grandson’s chief companions. But there was a yet more cherished pet near by: a beautiful bullfinch, whose osier cage hung near the window, mute, and still as all beside in that quiet chamber, save for the low moan of the dog, who, raised on his haunches, his nose laid flat on the bed, his bright eager eyes wandering

from the pale countenance of his master to the grief-swollen features of the poor old woman, showed his vague consciousness of her grief and, as unmistakeably, demanded the reason of it. At the end of a few more minutes the "half reasoning" creature sprang suddenly to his feet, approached nearer to Henga's pillow, looked fixedly on him for a few seconds, then uttered a long mournful howl, his head raised in the air, and walked slowly out of the chamber.

The fearful, and to her ominous, howl of poor Trusty entirely overcame the restraint Dame Hedwig had placed on the indulgence of her grief, and she followed the faithful share of it to where they could more freely give it vent.

At a signal from the Doctor, Bertha took the old dame's place, whilst he informed Henga of her presence.

"Henga thanks the Princess Bertha," he replied, using, as was his wont, the third for the first person. He tried to raise himself in his bed, and smiled sweetly as he added, "This is kind, Princess. Gertruda could not come to Henga, and the angels will not allow him to go to her. You will tell her this, for you love Gertruda; and tell her, too, that *they* have come down from heaven to fetch him." Here he beckoned her to come nearer, and said, with a smile in which earth had no parallel, "Don't you hear them call, Come away! come away? You must tell this to Gertruda, and also that *they* have promised to come and fetch away my father; so she must tend our flowers and feed our birds, and—and—"

His languid eyes closed slowly. The watchful physician had mixed a cordial, which he brought to Father Swithin, and as the old man held it tenderly to his lips, the grateful boy kissed the trembling hand that presented it, and with an expression of confiding affection said,—

"Don't grieve, father; *they* have promised before the first violet peeps to fetch you to help me to tend our garden above."

If the angelic choir had themselves announced this gracious advent, the aged head could not have been bowed with more reverence, nor would the intelligence have been received with

more joyful faith. Somewhat revived by the restorative Henga turned towards the Princess.

“Henga has yet more to say,” he whispered; “but we must not delay. Do you not hear them call,”—he raised his finger, and continued with a sweet smile of thoughtful attention, “Come, come away? *You* may not hear them, Princess Bertha, but Henga does, and must obey. But first he will ask you to bear his little Liebchen to Gertruda, as Henga’s parting gift.”

He whistled low, so low as scarcely to be heard by mortal ear, but the little bird heard the call, and flew towards Henga with every sign of joyful recognition.

“My Liebchen,” he said, “thou wilt love poor Gertruda, and wilt whistle to her, to cheer her?”

The bird flew round the head of his benefactor, nestled in his bosom, pecked playfully at his hands and lips; but it was soon evident that even its ethereal love was too much for the struggling spirit.

“There, go, my birdie; Heng is sleepy; go to thy cage. The bell, thou knowest, has not yet rung the vesper hour; when it does, we will sing our hymn together.”

Liebchen flew obediently back, but instead of entering his cage, alighted on the cross of wicker-work that surmounted it. Henga’s head again dropped on the pillow, and his eyes closed.

“It is sleep,” said the Doctor, laying his finger on the feeble pulse. “Do not speak or even move. If he have strength to awake, we may admit a ray of hope.”

He was obeyed; and whilst Bertha and the Father remained in their kneeling posture, the Doctor stood at the foot of the bed on the same silent watch. All eyes were alike riveted on the beautiful countenance of the sleeping boy, tinged at that time with an almost seraphic glow, for the sun had reached the verge of the horizon, and its lowered rays, transmitted through the crimson screen, fell directly on it. Yet a few moments, and the sun has sunk behind the mountains, the glowing hues have faded, and



repressed tears flowed deliciously free as Henga's bowed head and swelling its downy breast, while clear the notes of the well-known vesper hymn—

“Meet requiem for the gentle soul ere now fled ever in the fold of the Good Shepherd!”

The fortitude—nay, more, the cheerful resignation which Father Swithin bore the extinction of that life had so long gladdened his path was an enigma to those who knew not the faith which sustained that aged saint, self-negation that caused him to rejoice in the removal of one who might, with too much likelihood, in future time have needed his care. Moreover, how natural him when they were so soon to meet again in a thornless paradise? Often when alone in his cell, son and his now unaided age obliging him to do outdoor occupation, even whilst tears of regretful rolled down his furrowed cheeks, he would utter *dimittis* as he recalled the glorious departure of his Henga, and exultingly dwelt on the dying boy's assurance that his messenger angels would return to take him to heaven. Hour by hour he would sit listening till the blessed summons “Come, come away!” would strike

were planted on their united graves, which, by the same agency, and oftentimes by her own hand, was daily strewn with grain for the downy choristers who delighted to sing among the overhanging branches.

Gertruda's grief at her brother's untimely death, poignant and pathetic as it was, was nevertheless tempered with thankfulness. Henga—her gentle, harmless Henga—could never now know scorn or desertion, both of which she had feared for him since his protectors were aged ; and when she heard of the death of his best friend, her gratitude was heightened, though her sense of loneliness was increased, as in Father Swithin she lost one who had added much to the few pleasures of her joyless life. The really strong—we speak of *moral* power—are often the most doubtful of their strength, and Gertruda, humble even in the moment of triumph, was grateful that one powerful tie to her convent had not been removed before she had irrevocably made the costly sacrifice of all earthly joy. But she was unjust to the integrity of her own motives. Doubtless the solace of the afflicted boy was the sweet *reward* she promised herself on her return to Koenigsfelden, but fidelity to her vows was the sole impelling motive. But Gertruda and Swithin were not the only mourners over Henga's grave : the Abbess and Dame Hedwig grieved as deeply, though on different grounds. Nor could his poor reputed grandame feel the same gratitude as Gertruda did at his release ; for how could she believe that any one whom the royal Abbess favoured could ever want a friend ? Neither did she perceive that death had released him from any suffering here. She saw him, amid the multitude of God's creatures, loving and beloved—saw how the earth yielded her fruits and flowers to his labour, how the lambs and goats knew his voice and returned his caresses, and how the birds of the air came at his call. She remembered how willingly he rose to his labour, how contentedly he returned to his rest. She believed him happy, and how could she rejoice at his removal ? Now, her only pleasure was in visiting his grave and cherishing his pets, more especially his faithful Trusty, whose companionship

was her best solace, since she was convinced he loved to hear of his master, and sympathized in her lamentations.

It was thus, the long winter evenings through, she used to relate to Henga stories of the past, assured that he, like poor Trusty, understood and sympathized with what she told, and as surely would never repeat them. The history of the wrongs and sufferings of his parent, of his own and sister's orphaned infancy, was almost daily repeated in his ears; and though the boy never by a word betrayed that they sank deeper, his aversion to all of the Hapsburg race (never relaxed but once, as we have seen, in his dying moments) significantly proved.

This unsuspected imprudence in the talkative old woman may account for Henga's possession of the faded garland, whose history the chronicler did not fail to relate. It was with many other relics of the past, carefully hoarded in an old oaken chest which always stood in Henga's bedroom, and to which he had unbidden access.

The Dame's husband, as it will be remembered, was a faithful servant of the Baron von Wart, and it was he who sheltered his unfortunate lady, her child and sister in his forest hiding-place. This faithful servant had accompanied his lord, the Baron von Wart, to the fatal banquet at Baden Castle, and there probably picked up the garland whose memory is entwined with so many tragic histories. It is impossible to trace its link with Gertruda in poor Henga's imperfectly-balanced mind, but we can imagine there might have been one.

There was yet another mourner over his untimely loss, and perhaps the deepest. Whatever might have been the cause—was it gratitude, pity, or remorse? it lay too deep for human ken to discover. The effects were the most unlimited indulgence of his benefactress towards the poor lad whilst living, and the most sincere grief at his loss; yet so silent and tearless was it that it could only be discerned in the homage the Abbess paid to his memory, which we have already noticed; and that when the removal of Father Swithin de-

prived her of his warm sympathy and eloquent appreciation, she would summon Dame Hedwig, and encourage her partial garrulity on the never-tiring theme.

But we too must bid adieu to what our readers have doubtless discovered to be an equally favourite topic with ourselves. Poor, guileless Henga! We do not term him *ill-fated*, though such would be the generally-accepted term; for if he had grown to man's estate, in the full development of mind and form which nature intended—if he had succeeded to his birthright of title, wealth, and honour, what greater happiness could he have inherited than was the portion of the marred, demented Henga of our tale?—a guileless life, a blissful death, and a lamented grave!

The Castle of Hapsburg, erewhile so teeming with family union, so bright with chivalry and beauty, whose halls were filled with guests, and whose forests rang with sportive jollity, was day by day becoming more silent and empty. Gertruda had left for her convent seclusion. The poor Archduchess's state was yet darker; and she had taken up her abode at the Abbey in the hope, in conjunction with the Abbess, to avert by certain rites and ceremonials the dreaded return of her husband to his prison.

The next departure was that of De Courcy and his lovely bride, whom he was naturally eager to introduce to his home and kindred in the Green Isle of the West. Aletta, too, restored to health and cheerfulness, accompanied them. She had benefited, with countless others of God's favoured children, by early disappointment. Perhaps the near view of the terrible fate to the brink of which her impatience had hurried her, recalled her to a juster view of the many blessings which she was about so ungratefully to renounce. She now regarded De Courcy as her sister's husband and her own kind brother. As the young earl at parting knelt, with mingled gallantry and respect, to kiss the Princess Bertha's hand, he said,—

“My fair cousin, if ever you lack a champion, this trusty blade shall leap from its scabbard to do battle for you.” Then lowering his voice he added, “Or rather, as the bride of the

bravest and noblest Prince in Christendom, to do you homage."

The parting of the sister-cousins, for such the fair trio might truly be termed, was very touching.

Farewells in those days were *separations*—to women especially, who rarely left their husbands' or fathers' castles for distant voyages. To cheer each other, however, they spoke of future meetings, for which they scarcely hoped; but they could never be again under the roof so fondly loved by all—that one fairy-land of our existence—the home of our earliest, happiest years!

Poor Bertha! as she sat at her casement, trying through her hazy tears to trace the long cavalcade in their wanderings through the forest path, she felt a sense of loneliness and desertion she had never experienced before, and could scarcely comprehend now. Could this be the bright world which a few weeks since was so affluent of friends? Where were they now? All gone; lost to her for ever: the playmates of her childhood, the friends of her youth, the betrothed husband of her choice! But she checked herself banished with strong effort the seductive image; and bitterly accusing herself of murmuring ingratitude in forgetting the one precious friend who remained—her beloved and suffering father—she left her own apartment to seek and cheer him in his.



CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DAUGHTER.

Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return
From following after thee ; for whither thou
Goest, I will go: and where thou lodgest, I will lodge :
Thy people shall be my people
And thy God my God. RUTH i. 16.

A FEW days of repose succeeded those whose vicissitudes have been recorded in the foregoing chapters.

Leopold accompanied his daughter and son-in-law to Basle, from which place they were to pursue their course on the abounding river to Rotterdam.

Albert remained with the father and daughter, and the trio, tacitly agreeing to avoid all subjects of irritation and excitement, enjoyed the few hours of intercourse which were, too probably, the last they should ever spend together on earth.

They passed the greater part of each day together, took their meals in common, and rambled together on the plain, or through the depths of the forest—that is to say, the invalid was borne on an open litter, his brother and niece walking on either side. The well-remembered localities through which they passed drew forth many an anecdote of youthful adventure from the brothers, of which Bertha was an interested listener. Yet it was evident, whilst the past only found its way to the lips, the present and the future lay heaviest at the heart; for, even after a few minutes of social cheerfulness, the party would relapse into silence, and walk forward for some distance seemingly forgetful of each other and all around. Yet with all this reserve one subject, with slight variation, occupied all thoughts—their threatened separation.

Equally ambitious as his more turbulent brother Leopold, the milder Albert entertained the same hatred to the Em-

peror's claims; but he was far from sharing the confidence he expressed of Frederick's acquiescence in the means they had concerted for his deliverance. He was too wise not to feel the risk incurred by resistance—too candid not to see its injustice. He loved—nay, more, he venerated his elder brother; yet, whilst admiring his self-forgetting integrity, he had not strength of mind to follow it.

Frederick's path, though rugged and thorny, was *straight* before him, and he followed it with a martyr's resignation. He would unhesitatingly have gone back to a prison far sterner than that which awaited him, but how could he resist the entreaties of brothers he so truly loved? How mar their schemes and disappoint their hopes? How vain to remind them that he had placed before them from his earliest arrival the Emperor's stipulations—that the choice was theirs, the necessity his! But this was not the only or the least heavy of poor Frederick's trials. He had recently received an intimation from the Prior of St. Gothard of the intended demand of Prince John of Luxemburg (titular King of Bohemia) of the hand of his betrothed bride, which had filled him with the gravest apprehension; for though the Prior, in forwarding this information, had not even hinted at the source from which it was obtained, and had abstained from any allusion to the visit of the Prince to the mountain monastery in pilgrim disguise, ecclesiastics of high degree were in those days so conversant with the secrets of princes, that the Archduke felt no doubt of the authenticity of his good old friend's statements.

Of poor Bertha's secrets and conflicts the reader is already the confidant. We therefore readily spare him the tedium of further recapitulation, which, though sometimes necessary for the clear understanding of the story, is generally wearisome, both to the reader and writer of it.

This season of rest, though of short duration, was essentially beneficial to the whole of the little party. It gave them time to consider their plans of future action, and thus guarded them from rash decision. It braced their nerves for ex-

durance, preparing them with prudence and fortitude to meet the coming inevitable struggle.

The return of Leopold broke like a tornado on the calm. The parting with his daughters had deeply affected him, and he strove by ceaseless action to banish it from his mind.

A few days after, and almost at the same moment, two authoritative heralds demanded entrance at the castle-gates, and a private audience of the Archduke Frederick. This being separately accorded them, they placed the documents with which they were charged in his hands, and retired.

“The Emperor’s mandate;” he said to himself, and his raised eyes showed from whence he sought strength to meet it. He disengaged the string which bound one of the packets, broke the numerous seals, and calmly conned its contents. These were an imperial command (in default of compliance with certain stipulations) for the return of the Archduke Frederick, as agreed by him, at a period of time now fully accomplished. A few autograph lines from the Emperor, which accompanied the official document, softened its rigid phraseology, but held out no hope of relaxation from its stern requirements. Frederick closed the packet with a deep sigh over the frail tenure of friendship and affection when opposed to ambition and self-interest; and yet he asked himself,—

“Am I not unjust to the Emperor in expecting from him sacrifices which my own brothers refuse to concede, even when my liberty, my happiness, nay, most assuredly, my life, is staked against their dream of ambition and revenge? My daughter too—my own Bertha—will she desert the wretched outcast for me but little worthy of her love? Will she let him go forth lone to his captivity?”

The thought was too painful; the feeling of utter deseration overcame the sufferer’s fortitude; he covered his face with his hands, and wept. But if fortitude had for an instant forsaken him, habitual resignation soon resumed its influence over that gentle nature; and accusing him of rebellion against evidence and ingratitude towards his relations and friends,

enabled him to submit to the decrees of the One, and with indulgence on the shortcomings of the others.

At length he summoned resolution to take up the oth patch, but his trembling hands long essayed in vain t the silken cord that bound it ; and the characters swam his eyes in attempting to decipher them.

The contents were, as he had anticipated, a demand Prince John of Luxemburg for the promised hand Archduke's daughter, the Princess Bertha.

The document was couched with formal, almost incoldness, conveying an intimation that honour, not incli had dictated it.

The pride of the father was roused at what he de slight to the acknowledged merit of his beautiful and plished daughter, and his first impulse was to ret indignant refusal ; but he could not forget how cordi had consented to the Prince's suit, nor could he conce himself the conviction of his daughter's attachment betrothed.

“ Bertha shall herself decide. Why should my dark fall upon her sunny prospect ? ”

As the father uttered these words aloud, it seemed a unselfish resolution they implied gave vigour and ch ness to his whole being. He locked up the docume massive cabinet, and taking those received from the Ex proceeded with a firm step to his brothers' apartmen solved to make them acquainted with their content firmly to express his determination to fulfil *his* enga unless (but of this he had no hope) they would, by time cession, prevent the sad necessity for his departure.

The Archduke found his brothers in urgent confabu They had heard of the arrival of the Emperor's mes and, with the animosity of ancient and unsuccessful Leopold determined to resist that Prince's claims. Mo the success they had recently met in engaging some p allies had considerably altered the cautious Albert's jud of their chance of victory ; and he almost allowed a ho

Frederick might eventually become a convert to their opinion, that there were circumstances in his case which would justify a breach of faith. But they erred in their estimate of a character whose lofty principles they could not understand. To Leopold especially it was a riddle. High-minded, ambitious, implacable men called him "the Glory of Chivalry." They admired, yet feared and hated him. Gentle, merciful, forgiving, they pitied Frederick alike for his misfortunes, and what they deemed his weakness; but posterity acknowledges that the firmness of the one brother proceeded from nobler motives than the dogged obstinacy of the other, and that Frederick was the truer hero.

Leopold heard his brother's determination to quit his dominions, and sacrifice all that was dear to him, rather than break his faith with the Emperor, with indignation bordering on frenzy; but when Albert, whilst repressing his younger brother's wild demonstration, dwelt on the right and probable success of resistance, and hinted at the ready absolution of the Holy Father,—Frederick's eyes flashed, and he replied in the spirit of his grandfather, the great Rudolph,—

"The legions of Xerxes could not force my conscience, nor could a conclave of popes absolve me of a broken vow. The oath was pledged by man to man, and in the presence of One who will strengthen me to perform it. But why, my brothers," he continued, his fine countenance softening into tenderness and his voice tremulous with emotion,—"why go ye about to break my heart by pressing what I cannot concede? Why brand with the name of weakness what it needs the bravest heart to resolve? Should ye not rather strengthen me for a sacrifice at which the flesh rebels? Think ye that I do not love my home, my country, my child, my friends, as well as ye do—that the breath of Heaven is not as sweet, that liberty is not as grateful to me? Ye know the price set on that liberty, but you deem your honour would be compromised in paying it. And have I no honour to guard? Nay, I will discard that name, too often made the pretext for wrong and bloodshed, and substitute

that of every honest man's birthright, *a good name*; and shall I recklessly throw away the only remaining treasure of my once rich inheritance? But I say not this to upbraid you. Have I ever done so? Have I asked you by word or look to yield your pretensions? Nay, be not wroth, Leopold, I will mend the phrase, and, if it please thee, call them *rights*. But, be they what they may, when weighed against a brother's freedom they were found too precious to be resigned. When have I urged the sacrifice or resented its refusal? Let us, oh let us, who have lived so many years in loving unity, now part in peace! Let no bitterness mingle with our last embrace; let our last look be a look of lingering love. On my part it will be accompanied with grateful thanks and fervent prayers. These thanks I would also render, and in person, to the generous Barons and Knights who have offered their swords and services in my cause."

"They shall be summoned," exclaimed Leopold, anxious to conceal the effect his brother's pathetic appeal had produced, not only on the wiser and more affectionate Albert, but on his own untamed self; "and perchance their united voices may win from you a consent which your brothers have been denied."

"Let the gathering be quick," said Frederick mournfully. "I shall not have many more days to spend beneath the old roof-tree."

It was immediately after this harassing interview that Frederick bent his steps towards his daughter's apartment. The victory he had just won inspired him with strength to venture another struggle.

"My time for action is short," he said mentally. "My years for solitude and reflection may be many. Now, now, whilst the fire burns brightly on the altar, let me offer up my last and costliest sacrifice."

He entered the chamber with a more elastic step and cheerful countenance than had been lately his wont; sat down at Bertha's side, and talked of recent events—of Henga's death, of Gertruda's profession, of De Lauffenberg's sudden disappearance; and then, after a short pause, in which he had marked

his daughter's pale dejection, said, "Time is bringing all things around, meseems, to abrupt conclusion or sudden change; passing away is written on all I behold. Home, country, friends, liberty—"

"Oh, my father, say not so!" exclaimed Bertha, beginning to comprehend the drift of his reflections. "Have you not many precious blessings left?"

"My Bertha, I have been called on this day to relinquish three of the *most* precious—honour, liberty—"

"Not yet, oh, not yet; speak not those dreadful words!" and the cheeks of the poor girl became paler and paler as her father continued,—

"The Emperor's mandate arrived this day for his prisoner's return."

"You must not, you shall not go! Shame, shame on my uncles, if they refuse any concession to prevent such an inhuman sacrifice! I will go to them this instant. I will entreat—remonstrate—"

"Stop, my child," said the Archduke, reseating her. "I have not stooped to ask, neither shalt thou. *Thou* only shalt decide my fate. I will go or stay as thou desirest."

"Then be my prisoner;" and as she spoke she took her father's hand in both hers, and said with a smile that scarcely concealed her heavy forebodings, "and I will hold you fast."

"Thou must hear my case first ere thou pronounce judgment. Listen, and do not interrupt my confession."

With trembling earnestness Bertha fixed her eyes on her father as he proceeded:—

"I am the Emperor's prisoner—taken in lawful combat hand to hand. For two years he treated me rather as a brother sovereign than a captive. I shared his palace, his confidence, his possessions, and might have shared even his throne had not the Pope forbad. His heart was knit to mine with the truest love, and he was happy only in my companionship; but when he discerned that, in spite of his indulgent affection, the home-sickness was preying on my vitals, he offered to set me, ansonless, free, and with no other stipulation than an agree-

ment on my brother's part to give up all pretensions to a crown, which the fortune of war and the votes of a powerful party had taken from my head to place on his. Neither the Emperor nor myself harboured a doubt but that kinsmen so loving would readily give up a shadow for the life and happiness of a brother. I bade my generous captor a grateful adieu, promising to return at the end of two months if my brothers refused their consent to his propositions."

Bertha's indignant astonishment would here have found vent, but her father imposed silence.

"Stop, my child; hear me to the end. Thy uncles refuse with disdain the Emperor's compromise. They have engaged a numerous host to oppose my return, They urge me to break my solemn oath, and thus to plunge thousands into an unjust war in defence of broken promises and betrayed trust. Now, my child, pronounce my doom! Shall your father stay a dishonoured and perjured man, or go, leaving all but integrity and the approbation of God and all good men?"

"Go; and your child will share your exile!"

In the rapture of the moment the father pressed his dutiful child to his breast, and she, in the enthusiasm of filial love, pity, and admiration, forgetful of all other claims, returned his embrace.

But there fell a cloud on each warm heart as memory brought up other and conflicting duties.

"Make no rash promises, my Bertha," said Frederick, the transport of the moment subsiding before its stern exactions. "Thou hast yet to learn that the third sacrifice I have been called on to make is of *thyself*, my precious, my dutiful, my only child! John of Luxemburg has at length sent to claim his betrothed. This very day of manifold renunciations, I have received his request—nay, demand—for thee, my only treasure. Bertha, I know thou regardest him with favour. Go, then, my child, take the hand he offers, adorn the station to which thou art called, and may Heaven bless you both!"

The head of Bertha had sunk lower and lower at her father's long-dreaded announcement of her lover's proposals

'or one brief moment the seductive image of the rapture of that lover when he discovered the object of his own free devotion in the coldly-wooed princess,—mingled with a self-accusing charge of ingratitude for love so true and disinterested, engrossed her whole being. The sound of her father's voice was in her ears, but she heeded not the subject of his discourse. When that voice ceased, only, did she awake to the consciousness of the crushing responsibilities that called her to action.

When at length she raised her drooping head, her countenance, in its pale intensity, bore at the same time an expression of suppressed anguish and calm determination. The tears were dried on her cheeks; and, though weak and low, her voice did not falter as she answered her father's request to hear from her own lips the answer he should give to Prince John's proposals.

"One stipulation, my beloved child, I may not conceal from you: your decision must be irrevocable and cannot be deferred. The Prince, it seems, waits for your answer to decide whether his future consort shall be a daughter of the house of Hapsburg or the heiress of the late King of Bohemia. This latter Princess will bring a crown as her dower, to which it is probable he would not otherwise be selected. Speak, Bertha; what is your choice? Have I not already divined it?"

"My father, you condescended erewhile to make me the arbiter of *your* choice; I beseech you now to decide on mine. Shall I, your only child, suffer you to go alone into unmerited exile? Shall I, over whom you have watched with a double parental love, forsake you in your heaviest need? Shall your child, your poor Bertha, leave you even for the only rival you will ever know in her love? *He* will find many to supply my place; but you, *you*, my father, in your lonely prison, who but she will cheer you in life, tend you in sickness, and weep over you in death? Speak, my father: shall your Bertha accompany you?"

The father held out his arms, and the tears which flowed

from the eyes of his heroic daughter were not altogether tears of regret.

And here we would acquit poor Frederick of entire selfishness. He had not, as she had, discovered the disguised Prince, and therefore thought the attachment he could not but perceive she felt for him was but a childish preference, which would soon be forgotten. He knew not the impression made on his daughter's mind by the consciousness that she was loved for herself alone—loved in her humble disguise; that she had from childhood been the guiding star of that lofty spirit, so worthy of her love, and so loved. Moreover, the Archduke hoped thus to throw her into the companionship of Prince Maurice, whom he thought a far more desirable husband for her. These thoughts passed rapidly through the Archduke's mind without finding vent at his lips.

Bertha too was silent, and he rose to depart, the interview having become intolerably painful to both.

After tenderly embracing his daughter, Frederick said significantly,—

“The day after to-morrow.”

“So soon! Yet we will be ready. But, my father, let your refusal be gentle. He deserves—”

“Our utmost courtesy, doubt me not.”

The struggle was now over, the victory won; but nature was exhausted.

When the door closed on her father, Bertha felt a cloud come over her sight. She staggered to a couch, and there Blandina sought and found her; and on that gentle bosom, in which she reposed all her joys and sorrows, Bertha wept a long time in silence. Then, with a tacit agreement to banish all reference to the past, both the Princess and her equally noble-minded attendant applied themselves vigorously in preparations for their melancholy journey.

CHAPTER XL.

THE TRIUMPH.

"Gather up thy wares out of the land, O inhabitant of the fortress."

1 WARLIKE assembly of the chivalry of the fourteenth century, worthy of the portraiture of a Froissart, met by appointment at Hapsburg, to offer their services to its Princes, and to declare their firm resolve to do battle with the Emperor in defence, not only of the liberty, but the crown of their lawful and well-beloved Prince.

Standing in the alcove in which we first introduced him to our readers, looking down on the waves of eager faces in the hall below, whilst the first accents of his voice stilled the mult of its crowded occupants, the Archduke Frederick opened his address in the well-known announcement of his grandfather, Rudolph the Great.

"*This is the time.** These words," he continued, "my noble barons, my valiant Knights, my well-loved friends, were, as you well know, the watchword of one who never allowed impatience to anticipate, or indolence to retard the performance of a duty. 'This is the time,' then, which his unworthy descendant deems the most fitting to express, as far as language can express, his deep and lasting gratitude for the service of your faithful services, and to explain to you the operative duty which obliges him to decline them; whilst—" But a sudden and universal tumult amongst the assembled throng here drowned the voice of the speaker: many laid their hands on the hilts of their swords, some drew them

* Rudolph is reported never to have been either too late or too early on any important occasion, and that the above was his favourite motto.

half-way from the scabbard. Albert, who sat on one side of his brother, tried in vain to be heard, whilst Leopold, who had stood on the other, left it to rush into the throng, applauding if not dictating, oaths of dissatisfaction and measures of resistance.

The Knights grouped in parties, argued with angry energy whilst amongst the most reasonable anger found its vent in condemning Leopold, and even Albert, for the concealment of their brother's determination to keep his faith with the Emperor. In the midst of this hurricane of fierce passions, Frederick remained silent and self-possessed, waiting for a moment of returning calm. This for a long time seemed hopeless, for discussion seemed to increase rather than prove a vent for angry passions, and threatening gestures began to accompany words of defiance. Amid much that we rightly blame in the manners of our rude yet heroic forefathers of the middle ages, they possessed one quality in which we of a later period would do well to imitate them—the virtue, now almost ignored, of *reverence for age*. Amid the tumult that reigned in the hall, even at its height, the voice of the Duke of Zährén-gen, the Nestor of the assembly, commanding silence, was heard and obeyed. Advancing into their midst, he lifted his helmet from his finely-formed head, still covered with silvered locks, and looking around with commanding authority, he exclaimed,—

“Shame on ye, my brethren in arms! Is it by clamour and rebellion ye prove your loyalty? Is it by refusing to hear his defence you show your love to your Prince? Hear him, I command ye—yea, *command* as a father does his children, to give your Prince a silent and respectful audience, and then to judge his pleadings righteously as before God and man.”

Profiting by the silence thus attained, and with a grateful look of recognition to the venerable author of it, the Archduke resumed his address. He spoke long and with an energy and pathetic eloquence, when, after relating what the reader is already acquainted with—the solemn engagement he had entered into to return to his imperial captor—he implored

His hearers to give up all intention of resistance, but the rather to aid him in the painful duty he trusted, with God's grace, he should be enabled to perform, and from which not even the love he bore his brothers and gallant supporters, still less the lures of ambition, could turn him aside. He urged, what was a little later so gracefully expressed by another captive prince,* that if honour were banished from the rest of the earth, it ought to inhabit the breast of princes.

The noble simplicity of this address made a suitable impression on many, and those the most reasonable of his hearers; but as the noble orator continued the spell fell on all, and the silence deepened.

"And even my friends," he said, "were I to agree to your unrighteous scheme of resistance—were you to shed your blood and lavish your treasure, so generously offered—were you even to succeed, against all probabilities, in snatching the iron crown from Louis's brow to place on mine,—think ye it could support its weight? Look on me, O my friends, a worn old man even in my noon of years—few and evil they have been, but they have done their work. Lay not, therefore, on me the crushing burden of a broken vow! Grudge me not an honourable grave, a spotless reputation. Let me live in the annals of my race as the man who kept his word!"

As Frederick paused, the aged Duke approached, and bending his knee, laid his sword on the lowest step leading to the alcove, and said, whilst vainly-combated tears rolled down his aged cheeks,—

"My beloved Prince, though forbidden to draw my sword in your cause, let me at least lay it at your feet."

The tears, the devotion of his aged friend overcame the calm dignity, which the consciousness of a righteous cause had hitherto enabled Frederick to fulfil his task. Deeply moved, he descended into the hall, warmly embraced the noble veteran; and as he passed through its length a scene of much interest followed.

* John Baliol, King of Scotland.

Those who had lately censured their Prince now thronged round him to kneel at his feet and implore a last look, a token a blessing valued and sacred as the blessing of a saint or martyr. Even the most turbulent were subdued—if not by his words and presence, by the secret promise of Leopold to forcibly resist the departure of his brother.

And thus ended the interview so long dreaded by the noble Victor—ended in the most complete yet difficult of triumphs—a moral victory, as superior to a physical as heart and soul are to bones and sinews.

Although the weaker flesh felt exhausted by the conflict, Frederick was a far happier man now it was over. He had resigned much that was dear to him—his liberty, his country, his friends; but he had saved his honour, and still possessed his daughter.

Whilst engaged in an act of grateful devotion in the retirement of his chamber, the Duke was recalled to the pressing duties of the passing hour by the entrance of Dr. Baumgarten.

“Thou dost not repent of thy generous devotion?” asked the Archduke.

“I came to announce that all is ready for our departure at the first streak of to-morrow’s dawn.”

“To-morrow’s?”

“It is sudden, but necessary. I have discovered a scheme for the detention of your Highness, which is planned for execution on the day following. I may not stay to explain it now; let it suffice to add that I have just witnessed the departure of your royal brothers for the Fortress—”

“When to return?” broke in the impatient querist.

“To-morrow at noon.”

“Then we meet no more! But this is no time for regret—But the Princess?”

“She is gone to the Abbey; but Blandina answers for their prompt readiness. All else is arranged.”

“I went thither myself this morning,” said the Prince, relapsing into deep dejection; “but I did not then know it

was a last visit. I would not that my sister should hear of my departure first from rumour. I wished, too, to place my poor afflicted wife under that sweet Gertruda's (Sister Monica I think they now call her) care, and to solicit for them all the guardianship of the Abbot. Oh, Doctor, is it indeed that we shall meet no more?"

"On earth, perhaps. But your Highness must banish the past, and vouchsafe me your attention whilst I inform you of my arrangements for the morrow."

As Bertha had left the Castle before the assembly in the hall had broken up, it was impossible Sister Eva could have heard the intelligence of the projected flight; but whether, as is often the case, the consciousness of the possession of a secret made her suspicious of its betrayal, she fancied there was a something even more than usually significant in her tone and manner as she ushered her into her little parlour, and exclaimed, "Bless the Pope! what a red letter day! Two royal visits in one blessed morning. But does my Princess come hither alone? Where is her waiting-woman, the Donna Blandina?"

"I was borne hither in a litter, the good Seneschal walking at my side.

"Doubtless our reverend mother is cognizant of the pleasure that awaits her."

"How fares she?" asked Bertha, evading the nun's question.

"Our reverend mother is well, *Dei gratia*, but the poor Archduchess is sadly dark and wandering, bless the Pope! Sister Monica tends her like a ministering angel."

"Which she *is*," said Bertha emphatically. "And here is another," she thought, as Sister Ethel entered the portress's parlour to lead her to the Abbess.

The pallid cheeks and swollen eyes of the nun plainly told her knowledge of the intended separation; but the subject was wisely shunned by both friends, as they walked hand in hand through the long silent passages.

The Abbess received her niece in the same apartment, and with the same cold exterior, as we have described on her first introduction to the reader.

But how different were Bertha's feelings towards her then-dreaded aunt to those she now entertained ! Pity had banished fear ; and an earnest desire to comfort and enlighten, a deeper view of the corruption and weakness of their common nature had softened, though it could not eradicate, the remembrance of the burning indignation she then felt for cruelties inflicted on those she best loved.

After the first formal ceremonies of meeting, the usual silence ensued ; but Bertha felt she had little time to lose, and every tick of the clock called on her to improve it. Conquering as far as she could her own emotion, she spoke of her father's approaching departure, and her intention of accompanying him, when the Abbess, although she did not immediately reply, evinced an emotion painful as it was strange. The veins swelled on her pale forehead, their azure hue deepening. Her eyes became red and swollen, though no tear moistened their lids, and a cold tremor seemed to creep through her frame. With an evident effort, after a minute's silence, she regained her rigid composure, and spoke in her usual slow and measured cadence.

"Filial piety, my niece, has ever been the jewel of the House of Hapsburg. On *your* bosom it has shone in a fair setting of goodness and mercy; on *mine* its lustre has been dimmed by blood, cruelty, and revenge. Oh, my daughter, may you never know that bitterest of human anguish remorse ! May your fair youth never be stained by crime, or your after years be maddened by the remembrance of deeds too foul even for Infinite Mercy to pardon. Go ; fulfil your blessed mission. May He who hung on the Rood bless you and pardon—No, even *He* cannot pardon me."

"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," said Bertha solemnly, one of the texts in the Hermit's rosary having been suggested to her mind in this distressing moment.

A ray of unusual light shone through the Abbess's hazy

eyes, as snatching her niece's hand she exclaimed, “ *All sin didst thou say all sin?* ”

“ Yea verily, my aunt, *all sin*, to those who are willing to apply the gracious remedy.”

“ Repeat it. From whence didst thou draw the soul-reviving promise? ”

“ From God's own Word. You shall read it yourself, copied by the pious Hermit of St. Hilda from the Sacred Writ.”

And as Bertha said this she disengaged the bead that contained the text from the rosary of the spiritual Franciscans, which always hung at her side, and offered it to the Abbess.

“ Take this, my aunt. You will keep the little casket for my sake, and may you be enabled by faith to apply its contents to the everlasting comfort of your soul! ”

She laid her finger on the spring, and the penitent eagerly seized on the little roll, unfolded it, and her eyes seemed almost to devour the contents, when—oh, miracle of mercy!—those eyes, which during years of agony had never been moistened with a tear, now shed them in torrents; the big drops mingled into streams as they coursed down her slightly-coloured cheeks.

Bertha remained in silent adoring thankfulness, broken too soon by the watchful nun, who had from a distant part of the room, to which she had retired, beheld the unusual excitement of her charge, and hastened to her side.

“ Fear not, my faithful Ethelind; I have a talisman here which will prevent the approach of the wicked one; ” and, as the Abbess spoke this in a tone of unusual cheerfulness, she held out the magic scroll, and then returning it to its casket placed both in her bosom. The poor nun, who had never tested the panacea, and therefore knew nothing of its efficacy, still pressed Bertha's departure.

“ May the peace you have brought go with you, my niece, ” said the Abbess, as she embraced her niece. “ But you will come again to-morrow? ”

This Bertha promised, as she knew not *then* that this leave-taking would be the last, and that on that morrow she would

leave for ever the home of her fathers. And this was well: how else could she have sustained the parting from Gertruda? They had met but once since her profession, and that was when Bertha carried her poor Henga's parting gift; but then the friends thought not of the distance which was now to separate them.

Gertruda (Sister Monica as she was now called by all else) had been appointed, by the desire of the Archduchess and her own especial wish, the constant attendant on the afflicted lady, from whose bedside she came with a message expressing regret at not being able to admit her step-daughter, so overcome was she by the dreadful intelligence her husband had that day come to break to her.

“Poor lady,” said Gertruda, “she is sinking, I fear; each day I see her decline both in mind and body: yet what do I not owe her! I speak not only of past kindness, but of the solace it affords me to minister to her weakness. Without this interest life would be—” She checked herself as she looked on the anguish depicted on her friend’s face, and they neither of them spoke for some time.

What had they to say but on subjects they dared not discuss? Had they any hope to impart, any consolation to give? None on *earth*. In parting from each other, they were tearing asunder the last links to the past: their happy childhood, their loving youth, even those brief days of chequered light and shadow—those deeper interests known to both, but never to be recalled by either—all were to be severed, and for ever; for what hope was there of a future meeting between the nun of Koenigsfelden and the exiled Princess? These thoughts passed through the mind of both weeping girls as they sat silently, their hands locked together. Only one comforting word was uttered by both as they embraced at parting—“To-morrow.”

But there was yet another leave to take. The Abbot had sent a request that the Princess would not quit the Abbey without visiting him, pleading severe illness in excuse for not going to Hapsburg to bid her farewell. He had risen from his

bed in order to receive her, and his pale countenance and attenuated form bore witness to the truth of the plea, and together with his subdued manner excited her ever-ready sympathy, banishing all her former suspicions. Francis Montolivo had lately been under the salutary influences of pain and weakness, and that yet more subduing one of mortification. He had received from the Monk of St. Gothard (whom we have seen as the confessor of and unremitting attendant on his own emissary, the dumb friar, Gotfried) an account of the *ex cathedra* communication made to the Prince John of Luxemburg, and of the visit of that Prince to the Hospice in the disguise of a pilgrim.

Although the contents of that communication had not transpired, the Abbot doubted not his name had been mentioned in it; and, as the most mortifying circumstance of the whole affair, the Pope, at whose instigation he had been induced to effect the *detention* of the Prince (for of his ~~murder~~ he was even in thought guiltless), had given his ~~promised~~ guerdon to another. That his fortunate rival was the obnoxious Prior of his own monastery, whilst it added to the mortification, eventually proved the happiest relief both to the Abbot and his community, by ridding them of one who had sown the seeds of discord and discontent amongst them.

The waning honour of the House of Hapsburg had preached to the ambitious prelate from another strain of the vanity of looking forward to the future aggrandizement of an abbey, whose supremacy he felt was fast escaping from his feeble grasp. Did he, in these moments of declining health, think of that early love whose happiness he had sacrificed to his ambition? Did no thought of Gertruda's sacrifice, which one word from him might have averted; no remorse for the efforts made by him to separate the Princess Bertha from her betrothed—aggravate his sufferings and make him recognize them as retribution? We know not. The human heart is fertile in deception; but this effect we would record: the wise determination to quit the cabals of courts, and dedicate all of life that remained to the studies in which he so much delighted,

jointly with the rule and improvement of his Order and monastery.

A genuine admirer of all that is beautiful and exalted, he regarded the sacrifice of Bertha, which her father had that morning communicated to him, with mingled admiration and respect; and, if it had not already banished the jealousy he had felt at her independence of his control, it must have vanished, as kneeling at his feet she in unaffected humility implored his forgiveness and craved his blessing.

"Thou art already blessed, my daughter: blessed in thy noble renunciation of thine own will; blessed in thy filial devotion; and verily, thou shalt be blessed now and for ever!"

At parting the Abbot asked, "if there was any wish he could promote or service he could render?"

"Your prayers, reverend father.

"Those you have always; but cannot I add deeds to words? Well, if not now, if at any time I could contribute to your weal, or soothe the captivity of my beloved Prince, never will services be rendered more zealously than mine."

Seated in her litter, Bertha's overwrought feelings were relieved by a burst of tears. These, and the hour of autumnal sunset, the gentle exercise, the refreshing breeze, but far more the efficacy of prayer, restored her calmness, again to be upset by the information communicated by Blandina on her return.

"To-morrow?" she repeated, and in that word realized the whole weight of the sacrifice she was about to consummate. She sat down, covered her face with both hands, and wept bitterly for a few minutes; then arose, threw open the casement, and gazed intently on the beautiful range of country seen from it. The sun had just reached the tops of the mountain, and her eyes rested on it till it sank beneath them. They then looked on every well-known spot of glade and wood, and finally remained fixed on the distant spires of Koenigsfelden.

"Farewell," she murmured. "Home, country, friends, Bertha bids you all, *all* a long, a last farewell!"

And then, drying her tears, she resolutely determined to

devote her life to the performance of one paramount duty—the solace and support of her beloved, her injured and suffering parent.

She found him in his own apartment, engrossed with Dr. Baumgarten in preparations for his departure; that excellent physician (for moral as well as physical ills) knowing that the little exigencies of the present divert the mind from the graver ills of the past and future. With professional authority also prevailed on both father and daughter to partake of the much-needed refreshment of an evening meal, which he had caused to be spread in the Duke's private apartment. Assured likewise that the presence of the servants would prevent all reference to their departure, he took the opportunity of making with Blandina the final arrangements for it, by despatching under the care of a trusted retainer the few valuables and modest luggage of the exile band.

Blandina returned with him to the Duke's chamber, and attended Bertha to hers.

There was nothing but the usual affectionate embrace between the father and daughter; no reference to the trial of the morrow. They were going together, and in that blessed certainty all else, if not forgotten, was for the time at least banished.

The watchful Leech, with an assurance that all was prepared for a departure, that no one suspected, and a promise that he would be himself on the watch in the adjoining chamber, prevailed on the Duke to take some repose. Repose? Yes! The dreaded conflict was sustained; the crisis was past; and both father and daughter enjoyed some hours of quiet sleep.

In the grey dawn of the following morning, whilst yet a pale moon hung dimly in the heavens, the exiles passed through the castle-gates, wended silently down the declivity, plunged into the forest, and were soon shrouded from the trained eye of the solitary warder who had watched their departure from the Tower of the Hawk.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MISSIONARY.

AFTER the first few days, when all expectation of pursuit was over, the travellers journeyed very leisurely. Travelling was, a new pleasure to Bertha, and, with an eye to admire the beauties of nature, and with a heart glowing with gratitude to their beneficent Creator, every fresh scene was to her an added enjoyment and a lightened care. Then, the delightful consciousness of administering to her father's comfort and soothing his sorrows was the one and ample compensation for all she had given up in its exchange.

We need not say there were no railways in those days; but there were commodious though lumbering coaches, for one of which our travellers exchanged their horses on the morning of the third day.

There are yet many in our luxurious times who regret some such, and the delightful leisure enjoyed in that gone-by mode of travelling; the large roomy vehicle, the civil and considerate conductor, and his petted horses; the brightness of the opening day, the dewy freshness of its close, the repose of the midday halt. They remember, too, the devious ramble through the wayside copse, and the flowers and fruit gathered from thence for the feebler fellow-traveller in the carriage; the impromptu stop to examine some storied ruin or converse with a passing wayfarer, to sketch some feature in the landscape, to—But wherefore dwell on what can be no more attained, or, if attained, no more enjoyed? Yet this simple mode of touring lingered long, and was enjoyed by the traveller of cultivated tastes and simple requirements in our own century, ere the iron dragon swept them by his hot breath away, and gave us smoke, speed, excitement, and more and worse evils, for calm and improving enjoyment.

Our exiles reached Munich refreshed by their journey, and received a distinguished welcome ; indeed, the Emperor's reception of his noble captive was that of an affectionate brother. Touched by his voluntary surrender, and unfeignedly admiring both father and daughter, he lodged them in his palace, entertained them at his board ; and history affirms that the generous Louis would have shared his crown with his rival and captive had not the jealous interference of the Vatican forbade this chivalrous concession.

It is out of the compass or intention of our narrative to enter the mazy windings of the history of a period even more than ordinarily complex and contradictory ; we will therefore pass over the next four years of political struggle, until, worn out by disappointment and exhausted by contention, the Archduke Frederick obtained the Emperor's reluctant consent to retire to the Fortress of Gullenstein in the Upper Palatinate, in which peaceful retreat he passed the last two years of his turbulent and chequered life.

Before we accompany the exiles into their fortress prison, we must notice some events of their private life at Munich. These will necessarily be few, as, after a short sojourn at the Court, they removed into a private house, and lived in the strictest seclusion.

Before she left his court, of which he considered her the chief ornament, the Emperor spared no effort to induce Bertha to take her position in it as his daughter-in-law, to which her own father would gladly have consented ; but she was inflexible, both to their entreaties and the pleadings of the Prince ; for how could she, who had given up the betrothed object of her earliest affections for her father's sake, now leave his side for one who did not, and never could, possess them.

Like her aunt, the Queen of Hungary, her predilections had been in favour of a life of celibacy—a bias, it should be remembered, not at all singular amongst the remarkable women of the middle ages, many of whom were at the head of monastic institutions.

Both aunt and niece had, as we have seen, given up their

early and self-chosen destination to parental influence. In the case of the younger Princess, circumstances identified her wishes with those of her father.

We revert to those circumstances in order to explain why, having discovered the disguise of her lover, she did not acquaint him with her own. It may be—for we have sought to portray a *woman*, not an *angel*—that a mixed feeling of modesty and gratification might at first have guarded the secret, and that, when her hand as Princess of Austria would have drawn forth its avowal, she mistrusted her power of resisting the joint influence of her own inclination, and what she well knew would be her lover's ardent importunity. We have seen the struggle and its reward: for when was sacrifice made to duty and affection without reward?

We do not say that our heroine heard unmoved the tidings of the King of Bohemia's marriage, which took place shortly after her rejection of his hand; nor that her woman's heart was not soothed by the thought that it was not the Prince of Austria, but the novice of Koenigsfelden that possessed ~~his~~ affections. But her religion soon taught her to mistrust even this solace, and, with strong resolve and long perseverance, she succeeded in banishing from her thoughts the seductive image.

The first year of exile had not passed before the Duke had again become a prey to that mysterious sickness so expressively termed by the Germans *Heimweh*. He became silent and desponding, and the body suffered with the mind. He sighed for liberty, gasped for the fresh breezes of his native mountains. His doctor did all he could in his double capacity of friend and physician, but in vain.

"There is but one remedy," he said to the anxious daughter, "and that is hopelessly unattainable."

"But may there not be palliatives? Oh, that we could get Father Celestine to come hither!"

"I too have thought of that; for I do not like his Highness's Jesuit confessor. In spite of caution, the babbling tool will acquaint the Duke with all that goes on in the political world,

at least, as much as his employers choose shall be imparted. This increases his dejection, since, however groundlessly, my noble patient accuses himself as being the cause of all the bitter animosity and bloodshed so cruelly detailed to him."

Bertha mastered her indignation.

"But to return to Father Celestine," she said.

"The difficulty is to find his whereabouts. You know, he left St. Hilda's cave to avoid his former persecutor the Inquisitor, then Prior of Koenigsfelden?"

"But, as he has been removed to Rome, what say you to my writing to the Abbot, and asking his help in searching out the good Hermit?"

"If I could be spared," said the Doctor musingly.

"Which you cannot be. Therefore, why not apply to the Abbot. He bade me at parting go to him for any service I might need: I do not doubt his readiness and honesty."

"Neither will I; and I will this instant go and inquire for a trusty messenger to bear your despatches to him."

Whilst awaiting the tedious process of mediæval letter-carrying, a little episode varied the monotony of exile existence. The birthday of the Emperor was this year (it matters not therefore) to be celebrated with extra magnificence; and, whilst delicately excusing the Duke's presence, he had so strongly pleaded for that of his daughter that compliance was but obligatory.

That vexed and vexing question, dress, at once occurred to Bertha's thoughtful prescience.

"Not an article of her lady's wardrobe, however sumptuous and well preserved, could be worn on a birthday; and, on the birthday of an emperor the apparel of the court ladies must be, not only new in texture, but must display a novelty in form and decoration."

"Let not that perplex thee, good nurse," said the Duke, "I had entered into the subject of his daughter's adornment with unusual interest, "I give thee full command of my purse to pay for anything thy experience may deem befitting and thy lady's taste approve."

“Your Highness’s generosity, free as it is, will not quite compass the difficulty. Our court dames and their humble imitators in the city deem that nothing but what is far-fetched, however dear bought, is worthy their regard; so our merchants have wearied of filling their warehouses with goods they can find no purchasers for. The annual fairs are the only marts, and that of Leipzig is past. There are, indeed, the pedlars, one of whom, who brings the choicest velvets and paduasoye from Italy, is expected daily—to make his market, doubtless, of the Emperor’s fête.”

“I charge thee, then, to keep a good look out.”

“Ay, and to bring him straight into the presence. If I consent to wear these braveries, his Highness must choose them.”

The father smiled as he looked on the fair girl, and thought how little her native loveliness needed these outward adornments.

Only two days after this conversation the arrival of the travelling merchant was announced.

“How unlucky,” exclaimed Bertha, “that I have sent Blandina away! since I know not how to chaffer with these saucy knaves, who always ask the double of the right price, and expect you to bate them down, mark[by mark.]”

But the venerable figure which now entered the room banished all suspicion. He was a man of middle stature, elderly, but still robust and bent not beneath his burden. His features were of the delicate Italian cast, his eyes soft and expressive, but somewhat contrasted by the firmness in his close-shut mouth and lofty brow. He wore but little beard, but that, as well as his eyebrows, was unchanged in colour, whilst his hair, which rested in waves on his shoulders, was somewhat grizzled. He bowed respectfully but not servilely to the Duke, and returned the Princess’s courtesy with a grace almost equal to her own.

The father and daughter exchanged looks: they had both discovered in the features and deportment, and yet more in the accent, of the stranger a likeness which awoke their

liveliest interest; but, whatever that might have been, or his real calling, he forgot not the duties of that he had assumed, and proceeded at once to open his pack.

“I trust, friend,” said the Duke, “you have brought a good choice of the rich and rare. My daughter wants a robe to wear at the Emperor’s fête, and we look to your pack to furnish one that will be worthy the occasion and the wearer.”

“That will be a hard task, your Highness; but I have all the looms of Italy can produce in novelty and texture. Behold this rich damask-satin, that has never been worn but by our Princess Clotilda, and was invented for her bridal. Here is a velvet of the finest Genoa looms, donned on the same occasion,—God grant of happy omen!—by Madama the Duchess-mother of Savoy.”

Whilst the Duke was regarding with fixed attention the vendor rather than his goods, Bertha had selected a fabric of less cumbrous material, and presented it to him for his approval. He hesitated, leaning still to the more costly material, when the Pedlar, with most unpedlar-like disinterestedness, warmly seconded the Princess’s choice, saying,—

“Youth (he might have added beauty) needs but few adornments; but I have one pearl of price, which adds a lustre to the fairest and loveliest, as to the most homely. I would I might offer it to this royal maiden.”

“No, my friend,” replied the Duke; “I have more need to barter than to purchase such.”

Bertha made a selection of a few useful presents for Blandina and Inna; and the merchant, after shouldering his pack, advanced towards the Duke to receive his payment.

“Your Highness looks ill at ease,” he said, in a low sweet voice. “I have reviving essence, strength-restoring cords—”

The Prince shook his head mournfully.

“Can they raise a sinking spirit—heal a wounded conscience?”

“Perhaps not; but I have that which *can*. My Princess, will you accept the precious Talisman?” and, saying this, the

Missionary-pedlar took from beneath his cloak a parcel enclosed in folds of embroidered red cloth, and presented it to her.

Tears filled her eyes as she reverently pressed her lips on the plain dark covers of the precious manuscript.

"Hide it! hide it! I hear approaching footsteps. My Prince, you will not betray me?"

Frederick could only press his hand on his heart in answer before his Jesuit confessor was at his side.

The Talisman worked well; the panacea was all-healing—Engaged in the study of the Book of books, or the portion of it contained in the Barba's MS., a light fell on the long obscured path of the captive Prince, and Hope sprang up where Despair had so long reigned.

The venerable missionary, who was a countryman of Blandina, and a minister of the uncorrupted Church of the Waldenses, returned after a short time, and, although the meeting was not without considerable risk, was received with great delight, and the time eagerly anticipated when they could receive his visits with less risk of discovery.

At length the messenger returned from Koenigsfelden, bringing the long-desired letter from the Abbot. It had been delayed by the difficulty of finding Father Celestine's retreat; but this and every other had been surmounted, and the good father promised to join the little court as soon as they were settled in their new habitation, together with—a happiness as perfect as it was unexpected, the one whom all hearts most yearned to behold—Gertruda!

But was she not now Sister Monica, and a nun, and how could she leave her convent? Such was not impossible in those days, under certain circumstances and urged by influential persons, and thus it happened.

During the long decline of the poor blind Archduchess (who had been released from her semi-existence the year before) Gertruda had nursed her with an assiduity to which, all who knew no other cause, attributed her declining health—*falsely*; for it was the only interest that sustained her: deprived of which, thrown back on the irksome monotony of a convent

life, separated from all she loved, solitary and useless, she sank into hopeless prostration both of mind and body. The Abbot saw but one remedy, and lost no time, spared no effort, in applying for permission to administer it; prompted partly by his native benevolence, and partly by a hope of atoning for his former errors. Actuated by the same motive, the Abbess made no resistance; for *she* had yet a heavier score, which she vainly hoped thus to wipe off.

Thus, under the escort of her early protector, the Hermit of St. Hilda, who was himself eager to join his beloved Prince, Poor Gertruda, gaining health and cheerfulness by each day's Journey that brought her nearer her friends and carried her farther away from her convent, by short stages and seasonable halts, safely and happily performed the journey.

We do not attempt to describe the joy of that meeting. We must, too, though somewhat reluctantly, pass over the two years of peaceful retreat and social enjoyment that followed it, to relate that, at the end of that time, the rapidly-declining health of the Archduke threatened a speedy termination to their happiness.

The Prince was the first to perceive his danger, his daughter the last to admit it, yet he saw the necessity of awakening her to it, and would trust the hazardous task to no one else. His thoughts, ever occupied with the future of this orphan child, had during the last two years been carried into satisfactory action; and, now that he had wrung from his physician the confirmation of his own conviction of his approaching demise, ere the last grain in his hour-glass ran by, he determined to lay his prospects and wishes before her, and soften as far as he could the melancholy future that he knew too well awaited her.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE FORTRESS-PRISON.

'Tis not the good, the wise, the brave
That brightest shine or surest rise :
The feather sports upon the wave,
The pearl in ocean's cavern lies.

THE Fortress-castle of Gullenstein, the prison and tomb of one of the noblest and most amiable of Princes, Frederick, Archduke of Hapsburg, is, or rather *was*, a place of some importance, and before the invention of gunpowder deemed of impregnable strength.

It is situated on an eminence commanding an extensive view of a fertile but thinly-peopled country, whose inhabitants were principally congregated in the town just outside the fortification; a long straggling street, whose mean habitations contrasted strangely with a fine building which rose in their midst.

A hospital or lazarus-house, built, it was said, as a thank-offering by some grateful Teutonic Naaman, whose gratitude to the saint to whom he attributed his cure was further shown by the erection of a chapel on the hill above, which annually drew crowds of pilgrims to its shrine: a doubtful benefit, since these locomotive devotees helped in no small degree to spread the dreadful scourge which for centuries devastated by turn every European country.

But we will now resume our history, which we do within an apartment of the Fortress.

It is large, and furnished with the clumsy magnificence of the age, hung with tapestry, but carpeted with rushes. The invalid captive lay on a couch of carved and gilded oak, close beside a large open casement that admitted the view we have attempted to describe, and with it the soft evening breeze

that fanned his cheeks, and lifted the thin locks on his temples. On a small table near by stood a cage, tenanted by Henga's, and—may we not hope?—the reader's *Liebchen*; and one seldom absent from the sick man's side sat by it—his dutiful daughter.

She was simply clad in a white robe; her only ornaments a small bouquet of flowers, which she wore in her belt, and the rosary of the Spiritual Franciscans dependent from it. Although the years of trial that she had passed since she left the convent had sobered the vivid tints of youth and hope, they had deepened the intellectual thoughtfulness of her brow, and shed a halo of peace over her whole being, more attractive even than the hereditary beauty for which she was so distinguished.

She was poring over a time-stained manuscript, and as she attempted from time to time to decipher some passages for her father's amusement, he exclaimed,—

“Why, Bertha, thou hast surely got hold of some of good Swithin's Sibylline leaves?”

“The very same; sent me by the Abbot, *in memoriam*, as he said, of the wisest of gardeners and the simplest of men.”

“*Requiescat in pace!* of such is the kingdom of heaven!”

As he said this the Duke's head fell back on the pillow, and his eyes closed.

Just then the *Ave Maria* rose softened from a chapel in the street below, and Liebchen joined the vesper hymn. Those clearly-whistled notes recalled to Bertha, as they seldom failed to do, the death-chamber of poor Henga. She dropped the manuscript, and, her head resting on her hand and her elbow on the table, she remained, her eyes fixed on the pale countenance of the slumberer, until he opened his with a smile of recognition.

“You have been sleeping, dear father.”

“I have at least been dreaming—*day* dreaming. Shall I relate some of my cogitations, sleeping or waking, as may be?”

Bertha hesitated: she had her reasons for dreading the revelation.

Her father, however, went on: "My thoughts have been wandering far, though not, as usual, on their homeward way. Yet the country they visited bore a strong likeness to our beloved Helvetia, only that the sky was bluer, the air more balmy; that the streams were bright and clear, not cold and turgid, as those from our icy caves, and on their banks grew rows of mulberry and other trees, united by the supple branches of the vine, now glowing with their ripened fruit. Methought, on one green lawn, overshadowed by ancient trees, there rose a large and comely mansion; that at its portal I saw some travel-stained wanderers, who had crossed the barrier mountains to escape persecution, and ask for shelter. I saw how gladly it was accorded to them—how Blandina spread a table for them on the greensward—how Gertruda ministered to their necessities—how our good father and our doctor advanced to welcome them, and you, my Bertha—"

As the supposed dream developed, the truth shot through the mind of the pale and trembling listener.

"Stop, my father," she exclaimed; "in mercy lay no plans for so dreadful a future! Can you not trust your poor Bertha to the care of Him who hath promised to be a Father to the fatherless?"

"I can, *I do*; for I believe I follow His leadings in providing for thee the best home my love can devise, or my limited means furnish. Thou hast for my sake refused all other; wilt thou accept this?"

"How can I contemplate any you will not share? Oh, my father, my father, what a dreary waste the whole world will be without your love!" and the poor girl hid her face and sobbed audibly.

"Bertha, my child," and he drew her towards him as he spoke, "why this uncontrolled emotion? May I not answer thee with thine own reproach—where is now *thy* faith? My precious child, let us no longer deceive ourselves and each other by shunning the mention of what no silence can postpone; let us rather speak of the inevitable with calmness and hope. Think on thy father, love, as of one setting forth for

a distant land, desirous of placing those he most loves in a place of pleasant security till they are called on to follow him. I would I could have found thee one more suiting thy deserts!"

"Forgive, my father, oh, forgive my ingratitude," said Bertha, falling on her knees by the side of her father's couch. "The home your love has prepared for me and my poor friends will be dearer and more suitable to our habits and tastes than the proudest palace—" but the thought that it could never be shared together, unnerved even the strong man; and father and daughter wept together.

The Duke was the first to recover a measure of composure.

"My child," he said, "does this not almost approach rebellion? Thou hast hitherto been my teacher, let us together try to learn submission."

The painful interview was now happily ended by the Doctor who came purposely to order rest and silence for the invalid, but consented to its being renewed on the following day.

Frederick had passed a tranquil night, and the father and daughter met without any painful demonstration of outward grief, though poor Bertha's pale countenance showed how hard the struggle was to control hers. She took her seat near the invalid's couch, and one of his hands, which she pressed to her lips.

"The barrier which thy too tender love had raised between us"—it was thus he began—"having been removed, my beloved child, thou shalt now hear what mine has essayed, and all, alas! too little, to do for thee. In the first years of our exile I dreamt not of separation. I was in the meridian of life, and though I did not urge it then, I hoped thou mightest still yield to Prince Maurice's suit, and thus find protectors in him and his generous sire. I respected your scruples, but could not understand them. Exiled, humbled, disappointed, the world still held me captive; and I could not relinquish its distinctions for thee, though they had eluded my own grasp. Ay, my child, such was thy father's bondage when the glorious truth set me free. That precious volume

of God's Word sent me by his minister dispelled the mists of earth, and chased ambition even from its last retreat—thy precious self."

Bertha again kissed the pale thin hand she held, but did not interrupt the speaker.

"My one object now, for waning health bade me not delay, was to seek a home for thy orphan state more suitable to thy wishes, and I do not now conceal from thee the difficulty of the task. To place thee under the guardianship of thy uncles was to subject thee to solicitations, if not absolute commands, that thou could'st not yield to. My sister I knew would receive thee with open arms; but, though a convent is almost the only safe retreat of unprotected and high-born maidens, I knew it was as contrary to thy principles as thy taste to enter one. What, then, could I do? Again the holy man of the valleys came—may I not say was sent?—to my aid. He told me of a fair inheritance in his sequestered valleys just vacated by the death of the owner, an Italian nobleman, was to be sold. He had no heir, and the title was an appendage to the land; a soft sounding name. Wilt thou be willing to be the Countess of Villar?

"But I anticipate," continued the father, who noticed the struggling emotion of his poor daughter. "I had just received a large sum of money from my brothers in payment of my share of some lands they wished to purchase; this, and the sale of my jewels, was more than the price, though scarcely half the worth, of the beautiful inheritance—that being too remote and sequestered to attract many bidders. My kind Doctor aided the Missionary in the purchase, and has since made more than one journey to see that all is arranged according to the wants and habits of its future inhabitants. My Bertha, canst thou ease thy poor father's heart by accepting his gift?"

She could only reply by tears and embraces.

"There yet remains a difficulty, which thou must doubtless perceive, and over which I have pondered through many a sleepless night. No retreat could be distant or secluded

enough to escape discovery from my brothers ; and, brave and affectionate as they are, I have too dearly proved that, where ambition is concerned, the claims of honour or kindred are little heeded by them."

"There is the Emperor's undoubted love and faith."

"To appeal to him openly, would be to drench Europe in blood."

"I only meant to favour our flight," said Bertha, with a deep sigh.

"And yet would it be fair to compromise his noble nature? My Bertha, let us wait patiently and submissively, and as surely as the sun now shines in the heavens, a light as clear will illumine our darkened path."

For the next few days the Archduke and his adherents and friends were engaged on important affairs. Father Celestine, an accomplished scribe, wrote from the Prince's dictation, letters of touching farewell to his brothers and the Abbess. He commended his niece to their prayers, but craved no protection at their hands, and said nothing of her future abode : thanked them for their kindnesses in past years, spoke no word of reproach for wrongs received, but meekly asked forgiveness for any he might have inflicted. These letters he committed into the hands of the Hermit, to be delivered after his death.

The letter he addressed to the Emperor was in compliance with a promise he had exacted to be informed of any change in the Archduke's health, or any desire he might feel to see him. This short despatch expressed that desire, and was to be conveyed by Dr. Baumgarten on the following morning ; but, recollecting the near approach of his birthday, his always considerate master deferred sending it for a little while, and the Doctor rejoiced at the delay, as he wished to watch the effect of his late excitement on his patient's sensitive frame. A servant now appeared to announce the arrival of the Governor of the Castle, together with the Préfet.

"One effort more," said Frederick, rousing himself to receive his guests with the graceful courtesy that so well became him.

The errand of the visitors was to witness the last will of the royal captive, which the Préfet did in a good text hand, and to which the gallant Governor added his sign-manual, calligraphy not being an essential accomplishment in those days.

These painful duties fulfilled, and left by his own desire alone, the invalid lay for some time in bodily and almost mental inactivity, yet with the sweet serenity of release—a feeling of duty conscientiously and happily performed. The acquiescence of his daughter, the grateful acknowledgment of all those interested in his plans for their future settlement, had fulfilled his most hopeful anticipations ; and to meet them once more assembled, and to address them with a few words of grateful farewell, was his last earthly aspiration.

Contrary to the fears of his physician, the invalid suffered no accession of weakness from the extraordinary efforts he had made ; on the contrary, he appeared to have gained rather than lost strength, and he was even more cheerful than his wont ; and, though the experienced Doctor saw in transitory light but the glow of the expiring embers, he felt it to be no reason for thwarting his patient's earnest desire to sit once more at his own board, in the midst of his faithful friends and adherents, on the coming anniversary of his birth.

At an early hour of that honoured day, the gates of the Fortress were besieged by bands of the neighbouring peasantry, eager to offer their congratulations to the good Duke on the festive occasion, together with their humble offerings of fruit and flowers, or some little specimen of their ingenuity in basket-work or wood-carving : offerings of genuine gratitude, for the little court of the Fortress had proved a blessing throughout the whole of that neglected neighbourhood.

It was the Duke's special desire that these gifts of honest gratitude should ornament his own board on the day of their presentation, and that the table of the doners should be spread with profuse hospitality.

At his own he willed, with an earnestness that even the most

humble could not evade, that all his fellow-exiles, even to Inna's two pretty little bond-women, born in his house, should eat with him; and this they all did, saving that her husband, the simple-hearted, faithful Franz, stood at his Prince's side, and that Hans (no longer the little saucy urchin, but a tall sedate youth, who had come with Gertruda), with his two fellow adherents of a falling house, habited in their now rarely worn gorgeous liveries, waited on the guests.

But on such an occasion all were in festive guise. Even Sister Monica had pinned a rose or two on her veil, which she wore floating on her shoulders. Blandina, too, had lightened her black gown and dark locks by a kerchief and cap of point lace, the poor Archduchess's parting gift. The table was arranged with great taste and culinary art by the two *artistes*, Blandina's science being long established, and the fair nun no less celebrated for the delicate confectionery of the convent; whilst the Emperor had caused, amongst other dainties, game, shot by his own imperial bow, to be forwarded to the birthday feast.

Yet amid it all, sadness weighed heavily on every loving heart, for the conviction that it was the last marred the enjoyment of the meeting.

Inna's pretty little girls, whom the Duke would not allow to be chidden, made by their artless remarks a seasonable break; and when the dessert was placed on the table, the Doctor aimed at the further enlivenment of the drooping spirits of the guests by asking permission to introduce an absent and slighted member of the family. This was poor Liebchen, who, hung ambitiously high amid a bower of evergreens, had preserved a melancholy silence during the banquet—from a sense, doubtless, of injurious neglect at not having been invited to sing at it.

However, he was by no means a sulky musician, and no sooner was the door of his cage opened than he flew out to pay his compliments to the Duke. This he did most gracefully, first circling in the Arab fashion around the heads of the

guests several times with dazzling rapidity, and then alighting on the topmost leaf of the centre bouquet, and from thence darting down on the royal finger presented as a perch. After securing his stand, puffing himself into a downy ball, tuning, and bowing, he began his one sweet melody, and sang it to the close.

Whether it was the ecstasy of the children, or his honourable perch (for Liebchen was not insensible to flattery), he was so pleased that he, as a rare compliment, condescended to give an encore, and then, fearful, perhaps, of further encroachment on his good-nature, he flew back to his cage amongst the evergreens, calling on Sister Monica, in a language she understood, to fasten the door of it.

“Liebchen has set a good example—sung *his* evening hymn and gone to bed,” said the Doctor, approaching the invalid and offering his arm. “Is your Highness disposed to follow it?”

The Duke rose, and, leaning on the offered support, looked benignantly round the standing circle. He evidently wished, and had intended, to address them, and individually to bid them farewell; but this he found impossible. A few words of thanks for the honour shown his birthday, a few sentences expressive of his affection, his tender farewell, his fervent gratitude for their long-tried fidelity, and his deep regret at his inability to repay it, addressed to all, were all he could utter, concluding with these pathetic words:—

“Exiled, disinherited, impoverished, I have still one precious legacy to bequeath—my daughter. Promise me, my friends, that you will never desert her, that you will continue to her the same allegiance, the same disinterested love you have shewn her father, and I shall die happy.”

Pale, trembling, yet tearless—the solemnity of the occasion was too deep for weeping—the noble little band, led by the Father Celestine, advanced each in turn to kiss the extended hand of their beloved Prince, and on their knees to make the heart-responsive vow he demanded.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CAPTIVE'S RELEASE.

When wearied mortals sink to sleep,
How heavenly soft their slumbers lie !
How sweet is death to those who weep—
To those who weep and wish to die !

THE anxious Physician had not left the room many minutes in attendance on his noble patient, when the privacy of the remaining party was suddenly broken in on by one of the retainers of the Governor, who came in his name to request his aid in behalf of a pilgrim who had fallen down at the gates in, it was feared, mortal sickness, and had been conveyed to the hospital.

Father Celestine rose immediately.

“The Leech,” he said, “could not just then leave his Highness, but he would see what could be done until he was at liberty;” and, encouraged by an approving nod from her Princess, Blandina followed him on his errand of charity.

Left alone with Gertruda, Bertha, anxious for any employment that would aid in restraining feelings so deeply stirred by the scene just passed, insisted in helping her, in Blandina’s place, to restore to their places the unusual decorations of the table.

And here, as it bears somewhat on the sequel of our tale, we will explain (however homely the subject) that when, at the arrival of the exiled party at the Fortress, Blandina undertook the office of housekeeper; in order to spare her the disagreeable necessity of going into the general kitchen, a small room off the dining-room had been fitted up for her, with capacious cupboards, culinary appliances, and a stream of fresh water. There was, moreover, at the bottom of a long flight of steps opening into the room, a cave hollowed out in

the thick walls of the building, for the stowing away of roots and vegetables for winter use, together with an ample provision of wood. So that, well-stocked as it then was, the little *emporium* might stand a siege—no very remarkable contingency in those stormy days.

It was in vain that Gertruda protested against any participation of her toil. Bertha insisted on sharing it; and, indeed, without their united efforts, the task would have been no light one to replace the heavy goblets and other pieces of antique plate, and to store the almost untouched profusion of the dessert on the shelves of Blandina's presses, most of which were already bending beneath her provident supply of confectionery and dried fruit for the coming winter.

The labour accomplished, and the weighty bunch of keys hung at Gertruda's belt, it was proposed to go into the saloon, and there await the return of Blandina. The almost winter day was now nearly at its close. The weather was foggy; and as the casement was open, whilst Gertruda went to shut it, Bertha endeavoured to revive the embers of the expiring fire. This she accomplished with a little trouble, but Gertruda still lingered at the open window.

"Why do you stand so long in the cold evening air, dear child? See what a bright blaze I have stirred up! Shut, shut the casement; what *can* detain you at it?"

"I was watching the long line of pilgrims yonder, straggling through the streets. I marvel the shrine of Saint Lazarus has been well decked this year." This is the fourth returning band I have come across.

"But why do they stop at yonder door?" asked Bertha, who had come herself to the window.

"It is the hospital; and I fear it is to lodge one of their party who can proceed no farther."

"Small marvel that. Alas that men, and women too, should waste their strength and time on such vain journeyings."

"Oh, say not so; methinks I should like to be a pilgrim."

"And are we not all pilgrims, dearest?"

Gertruda sighed deeply. "Too truly; and my next pil-

grimage must be to retrace my steps to the shrine I came from."

"Never; or I will bear you company. But see, they have carried the sick pilgrim into the hospital, and the band go on their way, accompanying their weary steps with their mournful chant: is it not like the wind, now low and plaintive, and then brawling and discordant? But you shiver. Come and warm yourself at the fire."

As Bertha said this, she closed the casement, and both friends seated themselves by the side of the blazing hearth.

They had remained about half an hour in silent musings, when they were startled by a hasty knock at the door, and the abrupt entrance of the Leech, looking so unusually pale and agitated, that danger and her father rushed into Bertha's mind, and running towards the Doctor, she uttered the name ever uppermost in it.

"I left his Highness in bed, with the comfortable prospect of a quiet night."

"And yet your countenance betrays heavy tidings."

"So heavy and so urgent that I may not stay to soften them. The unhappy pilgrim, who erewhile fell ill at our gate and was carried into the hospital, is dying of—"

"The pestilence!" shrieked Gertruda, as she snatched away the Princess.

"'Tis even so," replied the Doctor. "But you may approach me without fear; I have avoided all contagion until I had communicated the fearful news and consulted how to act. I have seen the Governor, who has authorized me to offer his Highness and suite a retreat as yet free from infection, in his country-house, and distant about three stunden from hence."

"Let us depart without loss of time," exclaimed Bertha. "Hasten, Gertruda, and help Blandina to prepare for our removal."

"Nay, stay awhile," said the Doctor, who had regained his composure as the exigencies of the moment demanded. "You cannot find Blandina; nay, it might be death to seek her where she is engaged in offices of mercy."

“My precious nurse! Oh, fly, dear Doctor, to snatch her from infection!”

“It is too late. But be comforted, dear lady; all good angels will watch over that holy woman’s life. She must not approach you; it would peril that of your father.”

“She braved the pestilence to save mine. But God’s will be done,” said the poor girl in hopeless acquiescence.

“And He who preserved you both *then* will cause you now to meet again in safety. But sit down, my Princess, and you too, Sister Monica; for you tremble with cold and terror.”

The Doctor stirred the fire and placed seats near it.

“Try and calm your agitated spirits; we have yet time to project and prepare. The Duke cannot be moved until the morning.”

“And can he, even then, without danger?”

“As far as the removal, perhaps; but how conceal the motive? I believe the knowledge of the dreadful need would, on account of those he left behind, embitter his last moments?”

“Then why attempt it?” broke in Gertruda, eagerly. “Cannot the Princess and myself undertake the precious charge? I am used to menial labour, and can perform all that, and leave my beloved friend to—”

Bertha threw her arms round Gertruda’s neck, and sobbed out her gratitude for the proposition, which further consideration confirmed to be the only one that could suit the exigencies of the case. Having ascertained that the Doctor’s medical services were by no means essential to the invalid, and reminded that the Duke believed he would depart on the morrow on his embassy to the Emperor, Bertha combated her own selfish wish to retain him near her, and consented to his going to the aid of Blandina; though it was not without the strong conviction of the necessity of his services (since Father Celestine’s had been demanded for the town hospital) that Doctor Baumgarten overcame his reluctance to leave the Princess and Gertruda under such a heavy responsibility. He knew the Duke could not live many weeks, and might not probably survive many days, and he saw no other way of assuring his

peaceful departure ; and he yielded to their proposition, for he had no better to propose.

The mournful trio spent a few minutes in digesting their plans ; and when the Doctor took his leave, Bertha, as she pressed his hand, said,—

“ Farewell, my excellent friend. Remember, if dispersed *here*, we shall only be a removed, not a disunited family.”

Before we accompany his young nurses into the invalid's apartment, it will be well to inform the reader of the plans they had laid in the hurry and terror of the moment for preserving him from any contact with, or knowledge of the dire disease that had entered the Fortress. It will be supposed that from the sad position of the captive Prince, his apartments were isolated from those of the other inhabitants of the building, of which they formed one wing. They consisted principally of the saloon and adjoining eating-room already described ; the latter also communicating with the Duke's sleeping apartment, and within this was that in which his daughter slept. Crossing a short passage, and at the top of a narrow staircase, were the chambers occupied by the remainder of the exile band. We have already described the little store, or house-keeper's-room, appropriated by Blandina. How far was it from the thoughts of her kind assistants, when storing, only an hour or two before, the remains of a feast, that they were laying in provision for a time of need !

The slow-consuming complaint of the languishing captive had gradually restricted his diet, until a few of Gertruda's convent cakes—steeped in the rich Cyprus wine carefully supplied by the Emperor—was nearly all it consisted of ; and even this was swallowed with pain and difficulty. For the sustenance of the invalid, Blandina's cupboards contained an ample supply ; for their own moderate wants his gentle nurses had no further solicitude, knowing that they would find from the same hoard sufficient to support them through their self-appointed labours.

The invalid still slumbered calmly, as Bertha, claiming the privilege of the first watch, insisted on Gertruda's occupying

her bed, and took her seat beside that of her father. He slept almost without intermission, partially rousing up to have his pillow adjusted, or his lips moistened with a little wine. He did not notice his change of nurse until the next morning, when Gertruda brought him his early refreshment.

“Where is Blandina?” he asked eagerly.

“She is in attendance on a stray pilgrim, who is in a sore strait, dear father,” answered Bertha, relieving her friend’s embarrassment. “Will you not accept our united services until hers are free? I know that, even thus, they are of far less account?”

Doubtless the poor invalid thought so too, for Blandina was the pearl of nurses; but the shade of disappointment soon passed away, as giving a hand to each, he said,—

“With two such nurses I will not be so selfish as to grudge the poor wayfarer, even Blandina.”

That afternoon, the sun shining unusually bright, the invalid expressed a wish to see it set—he did not *say* for the last time—from the large western casement of the saloon. Accordingly, by the aid of his two supporters, he reached his usual seat, and seemed greatly to delight in the contemplation of the setting orb, until it was suddenly obscured by a mass of clouds, through which it struggled with a lurid glare.

“How these mists of earth dim our brightest lights!” murmured the Duke, as he turned his eyes downwards on the town below. “How deserted the streets are!” he continued, in a more cheerful tone; “the inhabitants must all have gone to bed with the sun. Not an anvil at work, not even a child at play. But here comes something at last. Gertruda, your eyes are clearer than mine; do tell me what this huge black waggon means that stops before the door of the hospital.”

Gertruda knew but too surely, but no ready reply came from her quivering lips, whilst Bertha, whose presence of mind rarely failed her, placed herself so as to screen her father from any further view from the window of that which turned Gertruda almost to stone; and ere the dark vehicle had rumbled

on to the next abode of death had prevailed on him to return to his room.

The Duke asked no questions and made no comments; with the solitary inquiry for Blandina, his connexion with the outer world and with the past seemed obliterated from his memory.

Perhaps this mysterious silence of the dying on subjects of once vital interest may be in the experience of many. Is it that they have an intelligence we wot not of?—or that, more likely, as death approaches, the dearest human interests fade before the nearer lights of Heaven? Thus it was with our dying captive. We have seen how carefully he had set his house in order, how generously earnest he had been to secure the welfare of those he left; these duties done, he seemed to find no strangeness in his isolation, and never again asked to quit his own chamber.

That second was Gertruda's night to watch, and before Bertha retired to rest she proposed to her a plan for the equal distribution of their time and services; to which, as she feared, the poor girl made a vehement, almost an indignant objection.

“Never, never, would she allow her beloved Princess to wear out her precious strength in such menial offices. Such must be *her* avocations, and honoured should she feel in the performance of them.”

Bertha kissed the glowing cheek of the disclaimer, saying playfully, “I see you want to keep your housekeeping secrets to yourself, and make all our dear invalid's spiced jellies and almond-cakes.”

But Gertruda was not to be conquered by raillyery; Bertha was equally resolute, and tried serious remonstrance.

“And what is it you mean by menial? Is it more unworthy of an empress, when necessity obliges, to minister to the wants and comforts of the helpless than to bend over the embroidery frame, or ride abroad with tasseled hawk on wrist? And, sweetheart, if noble blood is to bar useful labour, what difference is there in that which runs in the veins of the heiress of the noble house of Von Wart, and a daughter of the house of Hapsburg?”

"But the glories of *my* family are tarnished ; and moreover I am sworn to poverty, and have been reared to dependence."

"Vain distinctions all, in the face of our present position. But, oh ! my best helper, my only human dependence, do not run the risk of depriving our beloved invalid of your invaluable services by refusing my help in rendering them. Think of his, think of my situation, if you should sink under the unassisted burden."

Gertruda yielded, the monitor within probably warning her of a too great probability of such a result.

The point of division of labour settled, all other arrangements were soon agreed on, and a sketch of one day's proceedings will serve for the history of many a succeeding one. When Gertruda took her place, or rather turn, by the invalid's bedside, her friend retired to rest; but so eager was she to commence her new duties, that she slept but little, and rose before day.

With the exception of the labour, and that no light one, of fetching the wood from the bottom of the long flight of stone steps, there was little preparation to be made. The invalid's sustenance required none; and for their own modest wants, at least for the first few days, they had abundance of cakes, biscuits, preserves, and dried fruits, furnished from the fragments of the feast; and when these were exhausted, Blandina's stores offered more strengthening diet.

In the afternoon the sick man was removed from his bed to a couch near; and when his room was arranged and preparations for the night made, his nurses sat on either side and enjoyed with him a season of such holy calm as the dying Christian often said gave him a foretaste of heaven; and he would compare his quiet chamber to a little Patmos, and his attendants to ministering angels.

On these occasions Bertha sometimes read to him, but more frequently he would call on Gertruda to sing to him some of the Greek hymns of the early Church, which she had learnt from the Hermit Celestine, or others of Latin origin taught her in her convent.

A voice of such power and expression was sure to attract the notice of the Abbot. He had caused it to be cultivated; and on high festivals, when the beautiful novice led the choir, the church was crowded with listeners and admirers. But oh, how much more did she prize the rapt attention of her present auditor!

Sometimes Bertha would assist in chanting the services, the invalid himself now and then joining, and their little communions ended with prayer.

Such then, for twelve consecutive days, was the life, so singular, so isolated, yet so heavenly, of our recluses; and but for fears for those dear ones exposed to peril without, but for the daily decline of the object of their tenderest solicitude, they would have been to Bertha the happiest of her life. And even this approach to the inevitable separation which she so much dreaded was softened by the evident longing for release of the captive himself, and the delightful privilege of being permitted to soothe his last moments and shield him from all that would disturb them. But she had, alas, another cause of apprehension, which increased daily with the evidence of Gertruda's failing strength; and she vainly endeavoured to repel the dreadful apprehensions which associated it with that fatal evening when she stood at the open casement watching the plague-stricken pilgrims.

And thus passed day after day until the twentieth of their seclusion arrived. On this day an evident change took place in the state and appearance of the Prince. He awoke not as usual, but remained in a doze rather than sleep, breathing heavily, until the afternoon, when he was partially aroused to take a little nourishment, but desired languidly not to be further disturbed.

"I can yet listen," he said, turning to Gertruda with a soft smile, whilst the haze of death seemed gathering on his eyes; and she began with a weak and plaintive voice his favourite hymn, under whose lulling influence the invalid again fell asleep. Bertha's eyes alternatively rested on the

pale countenance of the slumberer and that of the sweet melodist—so sad, so suffering, so accordant with the words she sang. The hymn was that of St. Bernard, the

“Salvi Mundi Saluts,
Salvi Caput cruentatum.”

That passionate breathing which, two centuries before, had been breathed from lips as pure and holy as her own; and which, though five more have since elapsed, finds an echo in every devout soul. As the moving description of the Saviour's sufferings continued, the dying man awoke to a sense of their application, and with clasped hands he remained in rapt attention.

It was Gertruda now who claimed Bertha's immediate care, as, exhausted and fainting, she had sunk almost without consciousness. Compelling her to swallow the cordial she presented, she succeeded in supporting her to her bed-chamber, and restoring the poor girl to a measure of animation.

“My beloved Gertruda,” said the Princess almost reproachfully, “thou art ill, and concealest thy sufferings from thy loving sister. Thou canst not, thou *shalt* not, watch to-night.”

“And how will that loving sister bear the double load?”

“Bravely, when she knows that thou art at rest. Now to thy bed, sweetheart, and I will be thy tire-maiden.”

But these services were firmly declined, and Bertha noticed, with a too sure guess at its meaning, that even the parting embrace was avoided. The night that followed was the saddest for each of the trio. The Duke was restless, feverish, and at times delirious. He murmured of days long past, addressed some sleeping in their graves, and, even when calling on his daughter, looked on her with vacant eyes, whilst his hands wandered over the coverlid as if in search of something he did not find.

After some hours, the feverish excitement subsided into a slumber scarcely less painful, during which the heavy breathings of the sufferer were the only sounds that broke the still-

ness of that distant death-chamber, save the pacing foot-tread of the sentinel on the ramparts, and at intervals the exchange of the watch.

When the first streak of dawn appeared, Bertha crept softly into Gertruda's room, groping her way towards the bed, and whispering her name. There was no answer, and she repeated it in a louder tone. Yet all was still. For a moment she stood tremblingly irresolute, and fearful to pass her hands over the pillow lest her worst fears might be confirmed. At length she summoned courage; but no icy cheek met the trembling touch, no stiffened form lay beneath the coverlid; the bed was unoccupied. Gertruda was gone!

Having fetched a lamp, Bertha, almost beside herself with grief and consternation, ran through each apartment. She even descended into the wood-cellar, and found her not, and the dreadful certainty flashed on her mind that her only companion and help in trouble—she whom she loved with more than sisterly affection—was gone!—gone for ever!—had left her only to die. She wrung her hands in an agony too oppressive for tears.

But duty still more urgent, since she now alone remained to perform it, recalled her. Mechanically she went through the necessary avocations, and then returned to watch and weep by the side of her still slumbering father—to wet his lips, wipe the dew from his forehead, smooth his pillow, and lay her cheek close to his on it, repeating in his ear texts and verses of consolation and hope. For some time an occasional pressure of the cold hand she held showed the dying man's consciousness, till the deepening stupor deprived her of this consolation, nor could his tender nurse have longer administered it. Exhausted by watching, grief, and fasting—for she had taken no food that day—she rose with the intention of seeking some; but a sudden indisposition seized her: she felt faint, almost suffocating, and ran into the saloon to obtain air from the window already described, which she opened, and laid herself down on the couch before it.

The night was calm and still; there was no moon, but the

stars shone spiritually bright, and as the cool breeze refreshed her fevered frame, the contemplation of their ethereal loneliness calmed her mind, until a sound of heavily rumbling wheels, too surely recognized, fell on her ear.

She started up in terror, and approached the casement. Yes! there it stood, ready to receive its melancholy freight; the one lantern hung in front tracing the dark outline on the sky. And now it moves onward, rattling over the ill-paved street, until it stops at another death-marked house, another and another. Bertha, as if spell-constrained, remained at the window, her eye following the lumbering bier, her heart beating quicker, her bosom heaving more laboriously as it reached the bottom of the steep declivity,—and why? At the termination of the street, barring all communication, stood, stretched across the road, the entrance-gates of the fortress. Will they open to admit the fast-descending vehicle? The rumbling wheels are stopped; all is quiet. For one vibrating moment the stars seem to hearken in silent sympathy, distant voices stir the night wind, the gates creak on their hinges, they open, and again the fatal rumble is heard as the black hearse creeps up the steep ascent to the fortress. Bertha saw no more; she covered her face and uttered a cry of agony as the dreadful picture presented itself of the beautiful form of her Gertruda mingling with that festering mass. But even in her desolation she remembered her dying father, and this recalled and calmed her senses.

“Give me, O Thou Most Merciful,” she prayed, “but strength to close his eyes, and then take me with my beloved ones to Thyself.”

On her return to the sick-room, she found her beloved charge awake, his dove-like eyes beaming with peace and joy.

“Come hither, my precious child,” he said, in a clear sweet voice. “Help to raise me; I would sit upright;” and then, as she was placing more pillows for his support, by an effort not uncommon in the dying, he lifted himself from his recumbent posture to lean on the offered prop.

“No, dearest,” he said, as she held a cup of wine to his lips,

“ not here ; not till I drink it new with *Him* in His kingdom. Now give me one last loving kiss, for I am dying, my child ; my foot is on the confines of the dark valley : yet not dark to me, for He is there to light me through it ; and, oh, what a mercy is shown in the brightness of my dying hour ! For this I have prayed night and day—that whatever gloom might cloud my life, I might have strength and reason given me in my dying hour to breathe my blessing and my thanks over thy dutious head. Come nearer, nearer yet, and listen, my precious child. If in this hour of desertion, if at any other stage of life, thou shouldest be led in trial to regret the noble sacrifices thou hast made for thy unfortunate father, let this his dying testimony console thee. Hadst thou forsaken me—hadst thou left my grey hairs to go down in unsolaced captivity to the grave, my years on earth would have been dark and lonely, my hours of sickness and death those of torture and despair. But thy presence has cheered, thy care has prolonged my life ; and thy counsel and example have led me to that Blessed One who now stands ready to receive and pardon me. Oh, Thou who lived to save, and died to redeem a guilty world”—and, saying this, the dying saint clasped his emaciated hands and lifted up his glowing face—“ do Thou bless my child, and receive my ransomed soul !”

For one minute a glow of seraphic glory illuminated the countenance of the expiring Christian, a mixture of awe and rapture never witnessed but at such a moment, and once seen, never forgotten. Gradually and slowly it faded, and the lifeless form sank into the arms of his pious child ; and in that moment of supernatural ecstasy the mourner forgot her loneliness and loss. The darkened chamber seemed full of ministering spirits. She heard their harpings of welcome, she felt the soft fanning of their wings.

Gently, tenderly, she laid the lifeless form on its resting-place ; closed those eyes which had never looked on her but through beams of love ; kissed those cold lips whose breath was the breath of tenderness ; crossed those white and withered hands over the meek breast ; and then, throwing over all a

snowy cover, knelt down beside it—not to supplicate mercy, but render praise and thanksgiving. Praise for the seraphic vision of her father's blessedness; thanksgiving for his release from double captivity, and thanksgiving still more fervent for the gracious privilege of closing his eyes in peace, and for the strength given her to forego the brilliant destiny which once awaited her for the solemn duties of that lonely chamber.

With a conscience so at rest, with a body so worn, it is not to be marvelled at, that her mission fulfilled, she should fall into a sleep almost as deep and calm as that of the slumberer near. Still kneeling at his bed-side, her head resting on her arm, whilst yet the stern realities of her loss were but dimly realized, she slept. The footsteps of the sentinel were unheard, the exchange of the guard unheeded. The morning dawned, the sun arose, and yet she stirred not.

Some one knocks at the door; a light footstep crosses the room, soft breathings are on her brow, tender arms encircle her. She opens her eyes, and they are met by the anxious gaze of—Gertruda?

Alas, no!

CHAPTER XLIV. AND LAST.

FOOTSTEPS ON THE SANDS OF TIME.

Sigh not, ye winds, as passing o'er
The chambers of the dead ye fly ;
Weep not, ye dews, for these no more
Shall ever weep, shall ever sigh.

THE destroying angel had nearly poured out the full phial of his wrath on the castle and neighbourhood of Gullestein ; yet, though the plague was staid and few new cases had occurred during the last few days, many of its victims vibrated doubtfully between life and death.

The mortality had been chiefly in the garrison, yet the subtle infection had penetrated into the better ventilated apartments of the castle, and proved fatal to many of the dependents ; and even the stalwart form of the Governor had withered beneath its breath, and his recovery was yet dubious.

Amid the dying and the dead, with a philanthropy that braved all danger, and seemed to require no rest, our three Christian missionaries went from sufferer to sufferer, administering, in their several vocations, help, healing, and consolation. For some time they stood alone in the camp of death, but as soon as the want was known the convents poured out willing and able assistants of each sex.

It is impossible for us who—God be praised !—know nothing of the loathsome scourge but its history, to appreciate the value of such services, or to fathom the depth of such sacrifices ; yet, through the long plague-haunted era of the middle ages, there have ever been found the same Christian devotedness to shed a lustre on their gloomy annals, and brighten the dark history of man.

With the exception of the one invariable accompaniment—

the crimson death-spot—all writers agree in the many and opposite characters of the disease, embracing almost “every ill that flesh is heir to.” Whilst some of its victims raved in the fury of delirium, others shivered in the cold torpor of palsy. Some gave themselves up to the darkest despair, others, more revolting again, were convulsed with laughter and garrulous mirth. The most part died in agony, and the few, the very few, without pain or apprehension.

Of one such, since connected with the thread of our history, we would briefly speak. She was the only survivor of the family of an officer of the garrison, who dying himself of the plague, committed her to Blandina’s motherly care. She, knowing how her Princess would help to fulfil the trust, gladly undertook it, and with the Governor’s permission removed the fair orphan-girl into one of the most commodious rooms of the castle. Here we find her surrounded by her three anxious friends—and wherefore? There seems small call for such.

The bright setting sun illuminates the cheerful room strewn with aromatic herbs. Large jars of spices are suspended over the couch on which the object of all this care lies, apparently in a sweet dreamless slumber. Soon, however, she opens her eyes, which are mirrors of cheerfulness; her soft cheeks, too, seem tinged with the cool bloom of health, and her rosy mouth is dimpled with cheerfulness. Why, then, does Blandina weep? Why does the Doctor look so sadly anxious? and, oh! why those sacred emblems of melancholy import held by the holy Celestine?

Lift but one ringlet from that soft white shoulder, and the secret is divulged.

“How kind you are, dear friends!” she said, with evident surprise but without alarm, as she rested her eyes a little while on each. “But I need not your aid—at least not yet. I am not sick. I have no pain, no care, no sorrow. Go, Doctor, and you, holy father, to those who more need your help; only leave me my own dear nurse.”

It was some little time ere either could answer. Those courageous servants of the Cross, who had stood undaunted in

scenes of appalling suffering, could not behold that sweet unconscious victim without the tenderest emotion.

“My daughter,” at length faltered the Father, “living or dying, the ordinances of the Church must be consoling.”

She evidently comprehended the meaning of these words, but her countenance lost none of its sweet composure, only brightening into more expressive joy as she clasped the sacred emblem to her bosom. The bright radiance soon faded away, a dark shade passed over the fair face, the eyes closed, and she sank into Blandina’s arms.

“It is death,” said the Doctor solemnly. “Lay her down. Do not bend so closely over her.”

“Impossible! I have never seen so sudden a seizure.”

“The case is a rare, but not a solitary one. Here is the fatal sign;” and raising the glossy curls that fell over the fair shoulder, pointed to the crimson spot. “Had there been more external evidence, the danger from within would have been less imminent.”

“But you will not,” said Blandina, shuddering—“you will not allow this pure form to be mixed with the festering—”

“Not till you permit, nay, *desire* its removal. Wait! We will watch it together!”

They stood silently and mournfully gazing on the youthful dead, and soon a pale yellowish hue spread over its clear bloom, deepening by degrees into a livid purple; the nails became black, and every sign of rapid decomposition succeeded.

Blandina covered her eyes with her hands, and sobbed convulsively, whilst Dr. Baumgarten wrapt the sheet around the decaying form, murmuring softly,—

“It is sown in corruption, it will be raised in incorruption.”

The rumbling of the fatal bier was now heard without dismay; and the invitation echoing along the vaulted passages—“Bring out your dead”—was in this extremity of suffering accepted almost with gratitude.

Dr. Baumgarten’s attention was next directed to Blandina;

he insisted on her taking the refreshment brought her by one of the assistant-nurses, ordered her a medicated bath, and an entire change of clothes ; and received her promise that she would retire to her own room after following the former prescriptions.

“ We have now a sufficient number of able doctors and nurses to fill our posts, and it has become our duty to husband our strength for those who have the first claim on it ; therefore, when I have, as I am bound to do, reported the sudden yet painless departure of our sweet Margaret, I shall try for a good night’s repose by the same means I have recommended you.”

But neither physician nor patient were to enjoy any repose that night.

Refreshed and strengthened by her bath and supper, Blandina sought her old room, but to her terror and surprise found it already tenanted. A female form lay stretched across the foot of her bed, motionless—Merciful Heaven ! can it—yes, pale, cold, attenuated, it is—her own Gertruda. Yet why dwell on the painful hours that followed ere the poor girl was sufficiently recovered to give an intelligible account of her appearance ?

It seemed that, fully convinced that she had taken the dreaded infection on the evening she had watched the pilgrim band from the window, and her increasing weakness confirming her fears, she had determined, when the Princess left her for the night, to endeavour to find her way to Blandina’s apartment, and if possible send her to fill her place. She recollects little else, but she supposed she must have fallen fainting on the bed, which in truth she had ; but the prompt and efficient aid afforded by the doctor and nurse succeeded, not only in restoring her to consciousness, but to a measure of strength and serenity.

The dread that had possessed her mind was also dissipated by the Doctor’s assurance that there was not the slightest ground for it ; and she would have returned to her late apartment had he allowed, or Blandina given up her right of attendance on her beloved Princess.

How merciful was their meeting! How critical the tears of joy which flowed when told that Gertruda yet lived. But grief followed close on its wake, as they knelt together at the bier of the Prince, and father, and perceived the alteration made by grief and fatigue on each loved countenance.

On the first intelligence of the death of the Prince, his friends and executors felt the time for *action* was arrived. The future of the Princess depended on her escape from the castle before the news of her father's demise reached the Governor's ear. Often, when in their almost daily conferences on the future of his daughter, the difficulty of her escape unnoticed from the castle was discussed, but not overcome, the Duke would dismiss the subject with an expression of confident assurance that some way would be found for it,—and the Doctor believed that, *through* an agency they little anticipated, it was laid open before him, *provided* the Princess got away before the news of her father's death reached the Governor's ears.

But how should he prevail on her to quit those hallowed remains, almost before they were cold? There was but one way. He told her of her father's wishes—told her that the future welfare of those who had shared his exile depended on the sacrifice; and she, sweet soul, whose life had been one unselfish sacrifice, hesitated not, although to sit and weep beside, nay, to die beside those precious remains was her only remaining comfort, and to leave them was agony. She, however, arose at the call, pressed her lips in one parting kiss on the pale corse, breathed a few words over it, and left it in the holy care of Father Celestine.

With an agony almost equal to her own, the friend and executor of her father's commands threw the cloak and hood over her, and led her through many dark passages to a low door, where, in the same disguise—that of a Sister of Charity—Gertruda and Blandina awaited her. They passed without observation, were led by their guide some few hundred yards beyond the walls, and handed by him into the carriage which had brought the Archduke and his little suite just two

years before to his fortress-prison, and been set by at his commands in anticipation of the use it was now put to. Every accommodation had been added, and horses kept in training to start when wanted; so that the sun had not reached its meridian when the melancholy fugitives entered it; and ere its setting they had reached the convenient resting-place prepared for them—to which retreat Dr. Baumgarten had dispatched Inna and her children, together with the three retainers, on the first breaking-out of the plague.

The Doctor remained gazing on the retreating vehicle, his noble heart swelling with oppressive admiration and pity for the orphaned and exiled state of the heroic Princess and her companions. Then, mastering his emotion, he turned to execute his delicate mission to the Governor, full of anxious meditations how to account for the disappearance of the Princess.

He found the poor invalid weakened in body and still more in mind. The kindly sister who attended him said he had passed a restless night, and had talked incoherently of some young lady who had died of the plague—sometimes calling her the Princess Bertha, and at others his little Maggy.

When the Doctor announced his errand, his grief for the loss of his illustrious prisoner was swallowed up by the fear of the Emperor's displeasure; and although sometimes listening to the Doctor's soothing assurances of the unreasonableness of his fears, they would return the next minute. Neither, so completely was his mind imbued with the idea that death could come but from *one* cause, did anything the Doctor could say convince the poor man that the Archduke's death was not occasioned by that dire disease from which he was himself so severe a sufferer. Abandoning the hopeless combat with the sick man's delusion, the Doctor proceeded to entrust to his care the farewell letter of his Prince to the Emperor, of which, we have seen, he was himself to have been the bearer, had not the outbreak of the plague prevented, whilst its continuance prevented all present approach to the court.

"I have yet another document to present to your Excellency," said the Doctor. "It contains the last wish of our

departed Prince, that his ashes may rest in the crypt of the castle. You will see that his Highness has set his name and seal to it."

"Alas, good Doctor, I can see nothing, and do nothing, but must trust to you and Father Celestine to see the rite as decently performed as our melancholy circumstances will permit. But the Princess—where is the Princess?"

"She is gone," replied the Doctor, with evident embarrassment, which the Governor did not see, or attributed to another cause.

"Gone!" he repeated: "that sweet flower mowed down by the same ruthless hand—but, do I not recollect your telling me this last night?"

The Doctor was silent. After a pause, the sick man muttered, as if communing with himself, "Why should I part such loving hearts? There is room enough; let her lie by his side." Then, turning to the Doctor, he said, "Lay them in one grave, and let it be deep, deep!"

In the subterranean church hollowed out of the living rock, his faithful adherents laid their lamented Prince. They suffered no stranger hand to touch his revered remains, no stranger priest to chant his requiem; but after the holy ceremony was concluded, kneeling on the hallowed spot, they renewed the vow made to him whilst alive, to dedicate their remaining years to the solace and protection of his orphan daughter.

That same evening her earnestly-looked-for protectors reached the temporary retreat of the Princess. They found her calm, and, together with Blandina and Gertruda, sufficiently renovated by their few days' rest as to be desirous of commencing their onward journey.

"I shall have time," she said mentally, "to weep for *him* when I have performed his wishes."

And during the inconveniences and fatigues of that long journey, that desire, and her habitual consideration for the comfort of others, sustained her. They allowed themselves but little rest, being anxious to reach their new home ere the snow, which had begun to fall on the mountains, blocked up

their way. On the last day, the dark purple clouds that had gradually curtained them in began to discharge their fleecy contents, and to wrap in one vast shroud the scenes of surpassing loveliness in which their future home was laid. But all within that home was warm and bright. Gentle welcome greeted them on all sides, but chiefly from the Missionary-pedlar and his simple but engaging family. Nothing could exceed the delight of our travellers at such a termination of their many and sore trials; and the fatigues and dangers of the route were forgotten in the realization of their most sanguine expectations—all but by one sad heart. She, who had so nobly borne her sufferings and her loss, who had so cheerfully struggled through the difficulties of the way, and concealed her weariness and her woe—now there was nothing more to bear or to do, broke hopelessly down. She was carried to her bed, from which she did not rise for many weeks; and during the whole of the ensuing winter she remained in a state of great bodily weakness and mental depression. The strings of the harp that had discoursed such sweet music were broken by over-tension. The one great interest and object of her daily life removed, what had she now to rouse her into action? Hour after hour she sat and wept over *his* wrongs and sufferings who was a saint in heaven. Strange, but not unnatural, inconsistency of the human heart, for we witness what our loved ones endure on earth, but who can conceive the bliss that has awaited them in heaven?

Doctor Baumgarten made no violent effort to rouse the exhausted sufferer; he felt that the excellent nursing she received, and the soothing but not obtrusive affection of her nurse, and friend, would be the best restoratives. He trusted that

“Time, the consoler, too, would bring
Peace on his variegated wing;”

nor was he disappointed.

When spring returned, and threw its green mantle over the beautiful locality around her commodious dwelling; when flowers shed fragrance and beauty over the most secluded dell,

and clothed the loftiest peak ; when the birds strained their little throats in songs of grateful joy, Bertha felt that she too must awake from the apathy of grief, she too must pour her song of thanksgiving from her leafy *rétreat* and fragrant home. She felt still more emphatically, that it offered yet higher enjoyments and more sacred privileges—that “liberty of the sons of God” for which she had so long panted. It was a day of high and holy joy when she and her faithful friends and followers, renouncing the errors of their Church, and breaking loose from the bondage under which they had so long groaned, knelt together at the altar of that primitive Church that had never been desecrated by its cruelties and idolatries.

Banishing all luxury and needless expense, the noble exile adopted the simple manners of the people amongst whom she had found so cordial a welcome, and under Blandina’s experienced housewifery it was soon perceived, that the income which the Archduke mourned as so inadequate for a princess’s dower yielded a large surplus for the exercise of charity and hospitality. The claims of the virtuous yet oppressed Christians around were at all times allowed and attended to ; whilst those who daily arrived from distant lands met with ungrudging hospitality.

Located at the foot of those rugged passes said to have been trodden by the first apostles, their board was often thronged by the persecuted Albigenses flying from the terrors of the Inquisition into those valleys that iniquitous scourge has so often subsequently deluged with innocent blood, every drop of which will one day cry aloud, and not in vain, for retributive justice. With the returning health and energy of their beloved—no, not *Princess* (for she had, at his request, dropped the name and dignity of her birth, to assume that of the inheritance she owed to her father’s provident care)—their beloved *Countess* the happiness of the circle was complete.

We do not dwell on that of Blandina at her return to her native valleys, neither need we stop to describe that of our philanthropists in the wide and congenial field of

usefulness spread around. Gertruda too was happy—happy as so pure a soul could be out of heaven. Devotion was as her breath of life: and to be emancipated from the yoke of a cruel superstition, to serve God without terror, to love Him without a cloud between, was a new and unspeakable felicity.

Yes, Gertruda was happy: the earthly passion so nobly resisted, so conscientiously renounced, had left no scar; and if the harp of a wandering minstrel, the snatch of a ballad, recalled the memory she would banish, she dwelt on it only to breathe a prayer that *he* of whose love she was not worthy had long ago made another and a happier choice.

And now with a slower step we approach our heroine, and whisper that she too is content. If memory's gentle murmur, like that of the subsiding billows after a storm, threw sometimes a shade across her fair brow,

“ Which Folly might mistake for want of joy,”

it left no wrinkle on it. Hers was not the tumultuous triumph which the ambitious traveller achieves when he places his foot on the height he has toiled long and patiently to gain; rather would we compare her chastened satisfaction with the conscience-approving thankfulness of the brave commander who, having clung to his wrecked vessel until he has placed his crew in safety, reaches the friendly shore on its last plank. Still we are aware that all heroines have a right to a certain prescriptive *material* prosperity, and must plead immunity in the apology of Sir Walter Scott for denying the same to some of *his* peerless heroines. “ Characters,” he justly pleads, “ of a highly virtuous and lofty stamp are degraded rather than exalted by an attempt to reward virtue with temporal prosperity. Such is not the recompense which Providence has deemed worthy of suffering merit. A glance on the great picture of life will show that the duties of self-denial and the sacrifice of passion to principle are seldom thus remunerated; that the internal consciousness of their high-minded discharge of duty produces on their own reflections a more adequate

recompense in the form of that *peace* which the world cannot give or take away.”*

In concluding these “Passages in the History of the House of Hapsburg,” we return to the storied spot from whence they were first dated—the Abbey of Koenigsfelden—and to its Abbess-queen. The unfortunate Agnes lived to extreme old age, and survived all her collateral relations and spiritual children, notwithstanding the unabated austerities of her life. Let us hope that a repentance so continuous and sincere procured her pardon at the last. The Abbot Montolivo died long before her, when the cheerful Prior of St. Gothard was translated from these cold altitudes to the fertile enclosure of Koenigsfelden. Sister Eva lived to bless a succession of Popes, and to wear out St. Klare’s petticoat of Genoa velvet; but whether she ~~ever~~ found another *lost vest* our annals do not disclose. The Archduke Leopold died, about a year after his brother’s return into captivity, at Strasburg, of frenzy fever, whilst engaged in some futile effort for his liberation. His orphan daughters found the most generous protection from De Courcy and their own exiled relatives, of one of whom, the brother of the Minstrel De Lauffenburg, Alletta became the happy bride. The cousins never met; for intercourse was impossible without inevitable discovery. Doubtless, the sisters mourned the reported death of one they loved as such, and whose tenderness for them knew no diminution. Albert, whose early delicacy of constitution and repeated seizures rendered him so unlike his athletic and warlike brothers in outward accomplishments, though far superior in mental endowments, outlived them all, and by the prudent direction of his internal affairs and foreign alliances redeemed the sinking fortunes of his house. From this branch descended a long line of princes, of whom in the female line the present Emperor of Austria is the representative.

And the Pilgrim companion of our early journey—how fared he in his after-progress? We turn reluctantly to the scanty re-

* *Vide* Preface to *Ivanhoe*.

cords of those hazy times, and wish its end had been brighter. The affliction of blindness, which came on in after-life, is said to have aggravated the natural impetuosity of his temper, generous, though hasty. Perhaps, if he ever discovered his fatal mistake, it would admit of another solution ; and it seems almost impossible during his long and intimate connexion with De Lauffenburg that the secret, so interesting to both, should not have escaped. That truly-devoted friend remained faithful to the last. No doubt, like those of the sweet singer of Israel, his harp and voice were often exerted to drive away the dark spirit, and to cheer the sightless prince : not, however, to meet so ungrateful a return ; for the friendship of John of Bohemia, like his love, was unchanging as it was ardent, and he would have showered proofs of it in honours and emoluments had such been acceptable. But our gentle Minstrel asked only to be allowed to serve and solace his hero and prince, to dream of the unfading charms of his lady-love ; and to exercise his surpassing talent in celebrating the praises of both.

The brave Tell, too, whom the King had been equally anxious to requite, answered, like the wise Shunamite, "I dwell among my own people." The honour of having entertained his prophet in a time of exigency ; the yet greater privilege of having twice saved a life so valuable, could not be diluted by any meaner consideration in the estimation of the lofty and independent *Freischutzer*.

History reports that the warlike spirit of the King of Bohemia remained unsubdued to the last, that—unquenched by age and blindness, he caused the war-horse he rode to be led into the thickest of the fight on the memorable field of Cressy, on which he was slain.

His motto—*Ich dien*—was, as we all know, adopted by the conquering Prince, the son of our third Edward, and has been borne ever since by each succeeding heir to the British throne, surmounted by its graceful appendage.

Long may that triple plume wave over the brow of its present royal wearer !



